OLD!

THE ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO CLASSIC GAMES

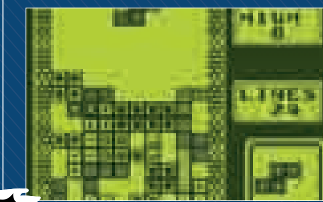
retro GAMER™

AMSTRAD | COMMODORE | SEGA | NINTENDO | ATARI | SIN... | ...RETROGAMER.NET

SHOOT-'EM-UP SPECIAL!

YOUR ONE-STOP GUIDE TO GAMING'S MOST ENDURING GENRE

THE MAKING OF...
TETRIS
CREATOR, ALEXEY PAJITNOV ON HYPNOTIC FALLING BLOCKS AND WHY HE LOVES PUZZLERS



THE MAKING OF...
CRAZY TAXI
BEHIND THE SCENES OF SEGA'S INNOVATIVE PICK-'EM-UP

SHEEP IN SPACE
JEFF MINTER
WHY HIS C64 CLASSIC ISN'T A FURRY DEFENDER CLONE

ARCADE INSPECTION
CPS-2
THE ARCADE BOARD THAT POWERED STREET FIGHTER II

BARGAIN HUNT
EVERY GAMES MACHINE LISTED
WANT TO START COLLECTING VINTAGE HARDWARE? CHECK OUT OUR COMPLETE LISTING

SPACE INVADERS

INVASION IMMINENT! HOW TAITO'S FRANCHISE CONQUERED THE WORLD

FEATURED THIS MONTH IN RETRO GAMER

BBC MICRO
THE 8-BIT CLASSIC THAT WASN'T JUST FOR SCHOOL LESSONS

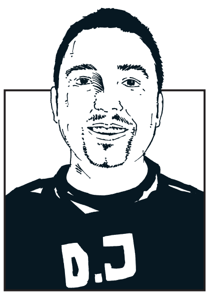
MICRO MACHINES
RACING AROUND TOILET SEATS WILL NEVER GO OUT OF FASHION

CALIFORNIA GAMES
SOAK UP THE SUN AND SURF SOME WAVES WITH EPYX'S EPIC SPORTS HIT

SKWEEK
DISCOVER WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE FRENCH REMAKE Q*BERT

THE RETROBATES

FAVOURITE BBC GAME?



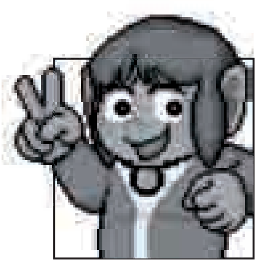
DARRAN JONES

For me it has to be *Exile*. The game itself is absolutely huge and the realistic physics still manage to impress. It's amazing that it came out on an 8-bit machine.
Expertise: Playing *Space Giraffe* without my retinas exploding
Currently playing:
Space Giraffe
Favourite game of all time:
Robotron: 2084



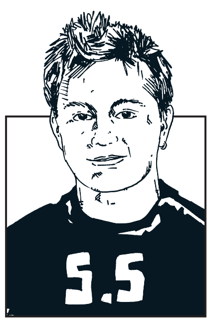
MIKE TOOLEY

It has to be Mr Ee. Not only was it a cool name, but it was a blatant rip-off of one of the best games ever. The BBC had produced an arcade perfect game that wouldn't be bettered until the SNES offering in 1996.
Expertise: Games that few have heard of and less have played
Currently playing:
id Software's back catalogue
Favourite game of all time:
Mr Do!



STUART HUNT

Stryker's Run is a great visual showpiece for the BBC. Leaving the safety of a well-fortified HQ, Commander Stryker must destroy a bunch of sailors using a gun and a toy helicopter. Yep, this is the one alright.
Expertise:
Games with flying bits in them
Currently playing:
Crackdown
Favourite game of all time:
Lucky & Wild



SPANNER

I'm not 100 per cent sure, but I didn't think there were ever any games released for the BBC. No one ever used them, you see. Yo Daz, you might want to check that out on Wikipedia before you print the article.
Expertise:
Not the BBC, anyway
Currently playing:
Tenchu Z
Favourite game of all time:
British Bulldogs Charge



DAVID CROOKES

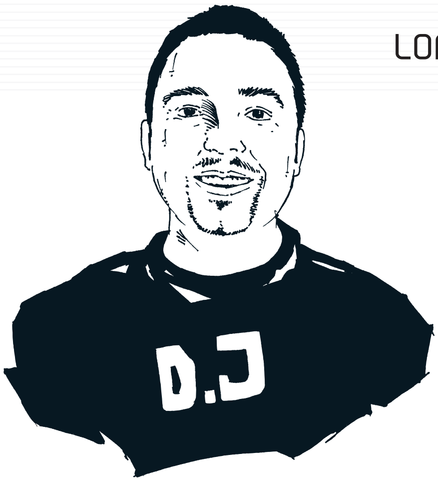
It's got to be *Chuckie Egg*. The first game I ever played, while still a young 'un at primary school. Egg-cellent (sorry).
Expertise: All things Amstrad CPC, *Dizzy*, Atari Lynx and PlayStation
Currently playing:
Impossible Mission
Favourite game of all time:
Broken Sword



CRAIG GRANNELL

Monsters – it's a big ol' rip-off of another game, but it's fun and playable. Most importantly, it's not *Repton*.
Expertise: Never managing to finish my new album
Currently playing:
Frenzic
Favourite game of all time:
H.E.R.O.

LOADING...



Well you've certainly been spoilt this month, as we're covering two of gaming's most iconic titles. Stuart Campbell finishes his in-depth look at Taito's *Space Invaders* franchise, while Alexey Pajitnov reveals how he created *Tetris*, a game that even your grandma has probably played. Indeed, with two instantly recognisable games to choose from, it was hard to decide on a cover, but I think you'll agree we made the right choice.

But that's not all. The magazine finally has a new staff writer, so step forward Stuart Hunt, lover of all things Amstrad CPC and the current office *Micro Machines* champ and yes, that's what he looks like.

It's been pretty lonely here since John left in January, so it's good to finally have someone in the office that I can bounce ideas off. It also means that those ideas will germinate into an even better magazine. Stuart has written a few articles in some of our past issues, but now that he's on board as a staff writer expect to see a lot more from him.

Eager to get off on the right foot he's already interviewed Sega's Kenji Kanno about the original *Crazy Taxi* arcade machine, and has plenty more exciting articles planned for future issues. He even makes a decent cup of tea.

Enjoy the magazine







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BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO CLASSIC GAMES

INSIDE

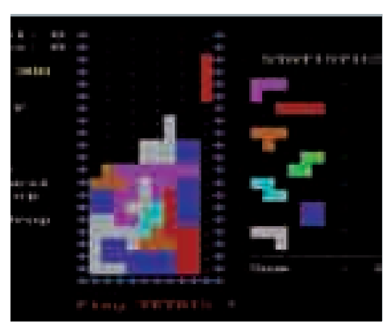
At-a-glance retro sections…

BBC MICRO





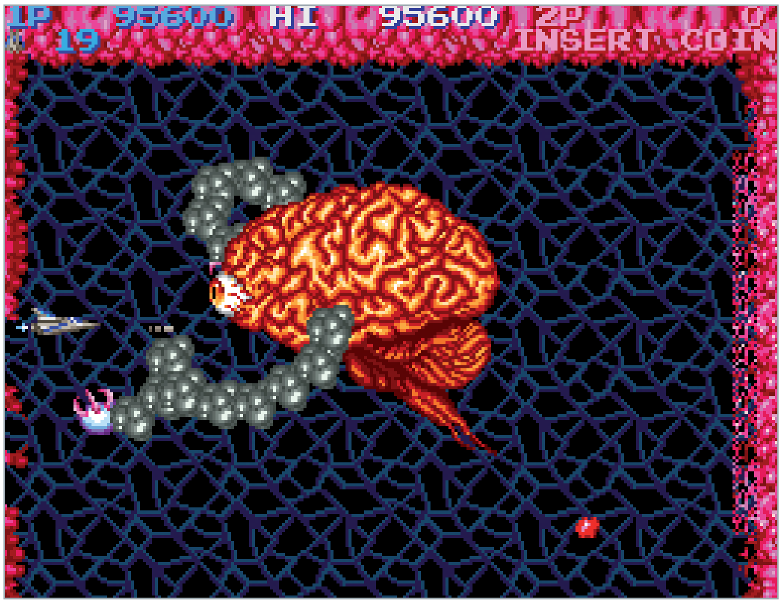




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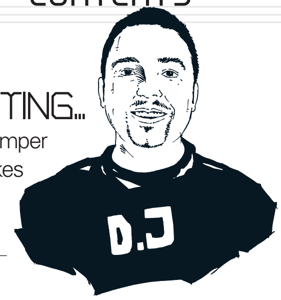
COMPLETE GUIDE



THE MAKING OF...



RETRORATED



THE GAMES LISTING...

Check out Retro Rated for bumper compilations and great remakes

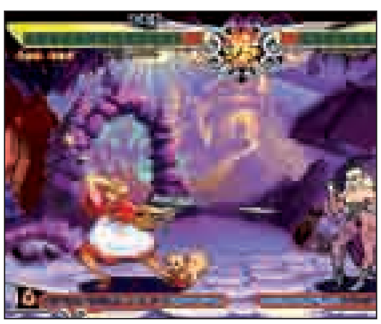
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COMPANY PROFILE

BIG RED SOFTWARE

ARCADE INSPECTION

CPS-2

THE MAKING OF...

SHEEP IN SPACE

THE GUIDE

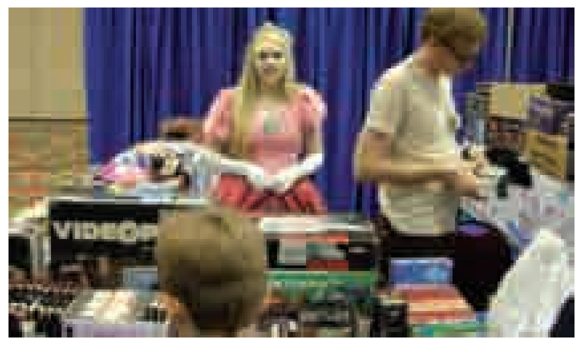
What's hot this issue…

CLASSIC GAMING EXPO RETURNS

MAT ALLEN REPORTS ON THE VETERAN AMERICAN RETRO EVENT HITTING VEGAS FOR ITS TENTH ANNIVERSARY



Lots of machines, lots of people playing them.



Even Princess Peach was getting in on the act.

British readers will probably associate the acronym CGE with the shows held in Croydon. Though if truth be told, the name was borrowed illegally from the retro gaming event that started it all. The true Classic Gaming Expo has been running since 1998, with this year technically being the event's tenth anniversary. The show also returned to Vegas, where it all began,



John Hardie conducts the bidding as Krystal models the next item.

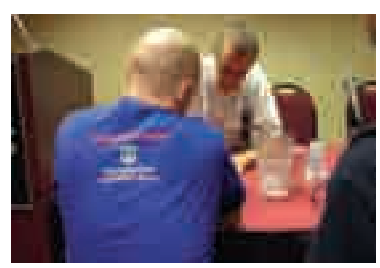
for this special occasion. The change to the Riviera Hotel allowed greater overall space for the event, with many attendees combining the show with the opportunity to sample the Vegas scene, once again. Never let it be said there's nothing to do in town outside show hours.

Aside from the excuse to take in Vegas, why visit CGE? For gamers and collectors there was a wide spread of different vendors present, selling games across all eras, modern and old, with a few stalwarts present. Combined with the attendee-based swap room off to the side and a plethora of exclusive homebrew releases, it was hard not to walk away with something under your arm every day. In fact, the extra bag we packed came in extremely handy for lugging everything home on the plane…

One of the highlights of the show is the auction after close of play on Saturday, and this year certainly did not disappoint. In fact, it was probably the most exciting, competitive, shocking and expensive auction set of all time. John Hardie, one of the show's organisers, becomes the director of destiny armed only with persuasive wit and a Corona in hand. This year's random assortment of retro goodies included an almost complete Vectrex collection, a life-size Solid Snake model and a boxed Intellivision keyboard unit, not to mention the ubiquitous "mystery boxes of crap".

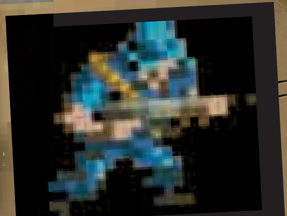
Not only did several of the items exceed four figure sums, but a number were also in aid of charity. The organisers have always been big on helping out those less fortunate, and so, some lots were purely there to raise money, such as the mystery boxes. One such box contained an Atari 2600 Video Life and manual, worth over $2,000 that was 'donated' to the charity cause from their own personal collection.

For those looking to play, one entire wall of the event was filled with arcade machines on freeplay, where you could game to your heart's content. Mostly collected from the classic era, it saw such classics as *Donkey Kong*, *Ms Pac-Man* and *Wizard Of Wor* rubbing shoulders with *Tutankham*, *Yie Ar Kung Fu* and *Warlords*. Standing by themselves were *Robotron*



Post-talk Jay Smith was kept busy signing items for people.

HERO OF THE MONTH



SUPER JOE

Every month, Retro Gamer looks back at a classic videogame hero or heroine. This month it's the turn of *Super Joe* memorable amnesiac.

First appearance: *Commando*

Distinguishing features: A different coloured uniform to his enemies

Weapon of choice: M1 Carbine

Most likely to: Hide outside big doors waiting to shoot those coming out

Least likely to: Sit down and have a tea party

Interesting fact: Due to German anti-violence laws, the game was released there as *Space Invasion* with all the enemies turned into robots

LOADING SCREEN OF THE MONTH

NO 24: THRUST (C64)



The loading screen to *Thrust* is as minimal as the graphics within, the merest hint of the frustration and addictiveness that lay beyond. A ship, a pod and a big gaping hole sum up what amounts to one of the simplest and greatest games of all time. Just a shame Firebird's loader was so pitiful speed-wise, to deliver it as quickly as we desired.

JUST IN

TYPICAL. JUST AS WE WERE GOING TO PRESS, JEFF MINTER'S BRILLIANT SPACE GIRAFFE APPEARED ON XBOX LIVE ARCADE. EXPECT A FULL REVIEW IN THE VERY NEXT ISSUE



Just a small example of the rare and weird that inhabit the museum.

and *Sinistar*. Both of which were looked after by Walter Day, the head of Twin Galaxies, who was running competitions throughout Saturday.

Complementing the action were the sounds of 8-Bit Weapon, their retro-themed music a perfect excuse to listen and boogie if the want took you. Wandering about you could spot Shane Monroe doing his radio show, or Keith Robinson concocting another promotion amid the crowds, and perhaps bump into someone you hadn't seen in ages and engage in a quick catch-up talk. The Classic Gaming Expo to us is also about the chance to hang out with friends and like-minded colleagues, while chilling out and having a chat.

Outside of the show floor were two other rooms. The museum is a huge space allocated to everything rare, collectable and unique in videogaming. It amazes us year upon year just what people own and have managed to dig up in their searches. Almost as much as the effort required to transport it to the show.

In the other room there were the scheduled alumni panels, where prominent figures of the past (which have included Nolan Bushnell and Steve Wozniak before) talked about both old and new times, and fielded countless questions from the audience. On this occasion it was Jay Smith's turn, and his talk was especially enlightening. He went into detail about his time with the Vectrex, but before that with the Microvision. And he also talked about some of his more recent projects. Both managed to give much needed respite from the bustle of the main area, before you venture in once again to do battle.

The show is always a learning experience states John Hardie, even though they've been running it for many years. New things are tested and they are always open to suggestions about how to improve the event. No two CGEs have been the same, and that's partly why we keep going back. It's not just about the games, it's also about the people. If there's anything to be suggested, it's that everyone should get a taste once in their lives. The only sad part is waiting another year for the next one to roll around.

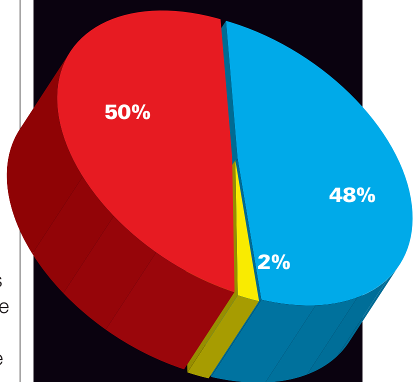
HOT TOPICS

WOULD YOU VISIT THE UK EQUIVALENT OF CGE?

Definitely, a weekend of playing retro games sounds like heaven **50%**

No, a weekend of playing retro games sounds like hell **2%**

Possibly, depends on how close it is to me **48%**



THIS MONTH WE'VE BEEN MOSTLY PLAYING…

WITH SO MANY CLASSIC GAMES TO PLAY AT THIS YEAR'S CGE, THESE WERE THE ONES WE KEPT RETURNING TO



» In case you never really read the editorial page, you may be interested to know that *Robotron* is Darran's favourite game.

ROBOTRON

Robotron **has always been such a ubiquitous and natural choice because of its finely balanced gameplay. It also has an unerring tendency to turn grown people into gibbering wrecks. This was also one of the machines that were being used for the competitions during Saturday.**



» *Warlords* isn't Darran's favourite game, but that's not to say he doesn't mind it. It's no *Robotron* though…

WARLORDS

Now this machine doesn't appear very often. We've only ever seen two in the flesh, although apparently just over a thousand were ever made. A pity because *Warlords* is one of the greatest multiplayer games of all time and as an experience, one of the purest you can find.



» Darran's never even played *Vector Pilot* before, but he's unlikely to like it as it doesn't appear to be *Robotron*.

VECTOR PILOT

And here we have something a little bit different. One of Kristof Tuts' future projects is a vector version of the Konami classic. Although there were a few minor scoring and difficulty issues, the game itself plays like an absolute dream and re-creates the arcade version superbly.



» If you can't afford the original arcade cabinet, why not download it from Xbox Live Arcade? That's what Darran did.

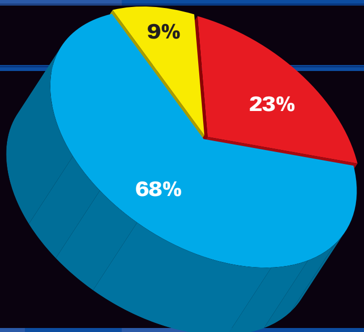
YIE AR KUNG FU

This has recently been released on Xbox Live Arcade. But this was an opportunity to compare and contrast the real thing versus the emulation. Over the course of several plays we couldn't spot any discernable differences although the outcome was usually the same, damn Blues.

HOT TOPICS

WILL YOU BE DOWNLOADING ID'S BACK CATALOGUE?

Oh yes, its games are a thing of beauty **23%**
No, I already own all the id games I want **68%**
Depends on the price really **9%**



YOU'D BE AN idIOT NOT TO

ID'S BACK CATALOGUE LOOKS SET TO QUAKE DOWNLOAD SERVICES

Now, in terms of classic compilation packs this unruly mob have probably formed a) one of the finest collaborations in recent years, b) one of the easiest on the wallet and c) definitely one of the most torturous on the old undergarments.

Yes the guys at id Software have been working their magic to release a compilation pack worthy of *They Sold A Million* and *Sega Mega Collection* stature. They have truly spoiled us by making nearly all of those fantastic games that we featured way back in issue 40 available for download. And the whole caboodle, (that's 22 games, including mission packs), can be yours for a calculator-confusing $69.95 (about £35).

There are some truly staggering titles up for grabs in the bundle, including the groundbreaking side scroller *Commander Keen*, the *Final Doom*, and the blowing-chunks-out-of-zombies shooter *Return To Castle Wolfenstein*. And that's just a taster of what's to come.

The games can of course be purchased individually, but considering the fact that the id Software bumper pack grants you a phenomenal saving of over a hundred pounds, you'd be a fool not to take them up on this fantastic offer. The id bumper pack is available by registering through www.steampowered.com and parting with a Saturday night's drinking kitty.

Okay, so our love of id Software has spilled over into our news section, but this deal was just too good to keep to ourselves. Besides, it gives us a chance to replace a paragraph of text with these fantastic screenshots.


In the last act of each level meet one of the four horsemen of the apocalypse, aka Derek, Stan, Glen and Gary.


Fusing FPS and survival-horror to create a grisly co-operative bloodbath and a fantastic appendage to the *Doom* lineage.


This marks a milestone in internet gaming. Some say that it's the best online blaster ever crafted by a band of humanoids.


A great shooter with a plot a mentally disabled person would struggle to make up.

BOULDER DASH ROCKS ONTO DS

HEY, ROCKFORD, WHY SO BLUE?

The mining of classic gaming gems takes a turn that's sure to please fans of irony. It seems everyone's favorite 8-bit prospector, Rockford, has been dug up for a new adventure: *Boulder Dash – Rocks!* for Nintendo DS and PlayStation Portable.

Anyone who is not familiar with the premise of *Boulder Dash* should know that it's an Eighties puzzle game chronicling the exploits of the world's fastest digger and his craving for shiny gems and annoying vulnerability to falling boulders. As these screenshots show, the last two decades spent underground have done little for Rockford's boyish complexion. In fact, it seems to have transformed him into a bigheaded blue alien.

Along with his new appearance comes a nifty ray gun, which can be used to pull boulders and vaporise alien monsters. Thankfully, it sounds like the excavation has been handled with care.

"To have the opportunity to work with one of the games responsible for so many of us entering the game industry is a great honour. We are really excited to be partnering with 10tacle Studios and First Star Software, to co-develop what we feel will be a great addition to the *Boulder Dash* series," said Alex Amsel, managing director of Tuna Technologies.

Boulder Dash – Rocks! is developed by 10tacle Studios, First Star Software and in partnership with Tuna Technologies.


The PSP version in all its glory. Expect it to feature the same puzzles as the DS outing.

We're not sure why Rockford is now blue but the game looks fun.



THE retro GAMER OPINION

"I was never really in to PC gaming when there's titles first came out, so I for one am very excited about this new announcement from id. Sure I've played games like DOOM, Hexan and Quake before, but it's going to be nice to have them all available at the same time."



Darran jones

"The absolute Zenith of id games is *Return To Castle Wolfenstien*, and the most exillerating game ever made is *Quake 3 Arena*. The game I'm looking forward to however is Commander Keen, imagine Mario if you will, without princesses, plumbers and mushrooms but sprinkled with humour."



Mike Tooley

"To be perfectly honest, I'm still a little suspicious of the whole Steam concept, and I'd be more likely to scour the bargain bins or eBay to grab old id titles. Still, if held at gunpoint and forced to choose, I'd probably go for Wolfenstein 3D, largely because of the warm, fuzzy and nostalgic memories."



Craig Grannell

"It may seem predictable, but I think Doom would be my first choice. The reason being I've yet to actually play an id game – despite their popularity over the years, they've never really slotted into my playing habits, though the news about its catalogue going onto Steam is still quite exciting."



Spanner

MUSIC TO OUR EARS

VIDEO GAME LIVE OPENS THE DOORS TO THE LONDON GAME FESTIVAL.

Kicking off this year's London Games Festival with a bang, a haunting hum and a cymbal-clash building to a grand crescendo will be Video Game Live: an evening of videogame theme music legally ripped by the Philharmonic Orchestra.

While many of you might foolishly jump to the assumption that Video Games Live is merely a music concert comprising videogame soundtracks, you'd be wrong. The event is actually "a musical, visual and interactive celebration of gaming that will enthral anyone who has ever played a videogame." Quite.

Including recent club bangers from *Halo*, *Final Fantasy* and *World Of Warcraft*. As well as a retro arcade medley of overtures ranging from *Pong*, *Space Invaders*, *Frogger* and *Tetris* (What? No *Ghosts 'N Goblins*?), the night promises to be an unforgettable evening of noise whatever your gaming tastes.

Hosted and conducted by its co-creators, Tommy Tallarico and Jack Wall, the music will be accompanied by exclusive video footage, a dazzling light show and interactive segments.

The concert… sorry "musical, visual and interactive celebration of gaming that will enthral anyone who has ever played a videogame" will be taking place at the Royal Festival Hall on the 22 October 2007, at 7.30pm, and despite our jovial spin on this story, you really should make sure you grab a ticket.

For further information on the event, simply pay a visit to **www.southbankcentre.co.uk.**

VILLAIN OF THE MONTH



COLONEL RED

Without villains there would be no heroes. What would Batman be without The Joker? What would Mario be without Bowser? Utter rubbish – that's what.

First Appearance: *Gunstar Heroes*

Distinguishing Features: He's red

Weapon of choice: His minions

Most Likely to: Share a stylist with M Bison

Least Likely to: Adopt a kitten

Unusual fact: His dad was a milkman in the Eighties

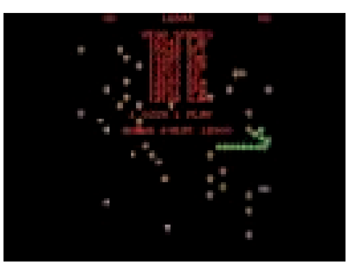
ATARI EVOLVE

ATARI CLASSICS TO APPEAR ON PSP

Reinforcing the fact that Sony's PlayStation Portable is actually a pretty nifty piece of retro-gaming kit, Atari has announced plans to bring a plethora of its early IPs to the handheld via *ACE* (or *Atari Classics Evolved* for those tiring of the acronyms).

The retro compendium promises to compile 11 classic credit consumers including *Asteroids*, *Centipede*, *Tempest* and *Missile Command*. High-score chasers may be pleased to hear that Atari is also planning to introduce an online leaderboard, to allow dexterous gamers the chance to flaunt their shooting skills.

The pack will also feature 60 original Atari 2600 game titles including *Yar's Revenge*, *Night Driver* and *Crystal Castles*. These games will be presented in both their original and their newly 'evolved' states.



'ONE COIN ONE PLAY' *Centipede* was never overly chatty.

JOE GUNN

TOMB RAIDER C64 STYLE

***Joe Gunn* is a new run-and-jump for Commodore 64, which looks so good we reckon Endurion has had it encased in an airtight tomb, within an Egyptian-cotton sleeping bag – or something with equally good preservation qualities.**

You play the role of quasi-Indiana Jones type Joseph J Gunn, who upon stumbling across a mysterious booby-trapped pyramid – which he suspects belongs to the rather angry sounding Crocodile King – sets off inside to pacify his curiosity.

Will Joe uncover the truth about the crocodile's fixed assets? Will he escape before something of catastrophic proportions happens to the planet? We're afraid you will just have to wait until our next issue out on 11 October to find out. Why? Because that's when we will be reviewing it, that's why.

So that's what they cram into Shreddies.



THE GALLERY

CLASSIC ADVERTS TO STIMULATE THE NOSTALGIA GLAND: THIS MONTH, WE'RE TAKING A GANDER AT SOME OF THE BEST AND WORST STREET FIGHTER ART



Street Fighter
Released: 1987
Featured Artwork: US Flyer
Does it sell the game? Well it's certainly dynamic, but it gives the impression of a free-for-all, scrolling fighter as opposed to the one-on-one brawler that it actually is.
What's cool about it: The cabinet in the bottom left of the flyer features those amazing pressure-sensitive pads that never seemed to work when you finally got to have a go.
What's naff about it: The crassly Americanised Ryu – an attempt to appeal to Western gamers.
Trivia: Interestingly, *Street Fighter* was only ported to one console upon its release: TurboGrafx-CD, where it underwent a name change to *Fighting Street*. While it did appear on several home computers, it didn't receive a near arcade perfect conversion until the release of *Capcom Classics Collection: Remixed* for PSP in 2005. And even then, nobody wanted to play it.



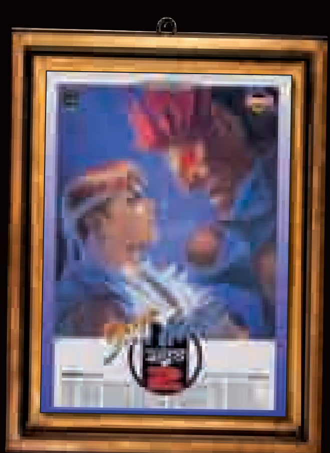
Street Fighter II: The World Warrior
Released: 1991
Featured Artwork: US Flyer
Does it sell the game? Of course it does. You have eyes don't you. Just look at it. Ryu appears incredibly imposing and is almost taunting you by turning his back on you. If this were one of those trashy women's weekly magazines we'd probably write something like 'women want him, and men want to be him.' Good job we're not, eh?
What's cool about it: The whole aura of menace that surrounds this piece of art.
What's naff about it: Please stop being ridiculous. It's perfect.
Trivia: *Street Fighter* was such a popular game that many of Capcom's CPS-1 boards were cannibalised so they could satisfy *Street Fighter II*'s huge demand. This makes us rather sad, as we can't understand why any videogame would want to eat Strider.



Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers
Released: 1993
Featured Artwork: UK/Japanese Flyer
Does it sell the game? Definitely, although it doesn't really make it terribly obvious who the new challengers actually are. They don't exactly leap out at you.
What's cool about it: This stylish artwork simply screams 'Style!'
What's naff about it: The aforementioned lack of focus on the new characters and Cammy's scarily powerful thighs.
Trivia: The coolest thing about *Super Street Fighter II* was the excellent tournament battle. Eight machines could be linked together so that up to eight players could compete against one another. Oh, and if you all wanted to play Cammy it didn't matter as each character has eight different outfits to choose from.



Street Fighter: The Movie
Released: 1995
Featured Artwork: US Flyer
Does it sell the game? Well, we guess it might sell the game to people that have a bit of a thing for past-it action stars that may or may not have appeared in soft-porn flicks.
What's cool about it?: What's cool about it? Jean-Claude Van Damme's got his guns out on the cover.
What's naff about it: What's naff about it? Jean-Claude Van Damme's got his guns out on the cover.
Trivia: One of the biggest surprises surrounding the *Street Fighter* movie, was that respected actor Raul Julia would be playing the role of chief villain M Bison. Sadly for Julia, after being diagnosed with stomach cancer in 1991, he lost his battle and passed away on 24 October 1994 shortly before the film's release.



Street Fighter Zero II
Released: 1996
Featured Artwork: Japanese Flyer
Does it sell the game? Of course it does. The flyer promises the mightiest of showdowns – Ryu verses Akuma.
What's cool about it: Absolutely everything. From the colour to the steely look of determination on Ryu's face. This was a battle you simply couldn't wait to win.
What's naff about it: We have measured the sprites on screen, and Akuma would never tower over Ryu like that. We suggest he may be standing on an unseen apple crate.
Trivia: When *Street Fighter Zero II* was released in the West it featured three new characters that didn't appear in the Japanese version: Evil Ryu and classic versions of Zangief and Dhalsim. They also made appearances in the Sega Saturn conversion of the game.



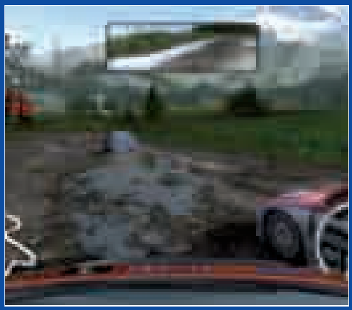
Street Fighter III: Third Strike
Released: 1999
Featured Artwork: UK/Japanese Flyer
Does it sell the game? Most definitely, 19 hard-as-nails fighters all ready to take on an unseen opponent. That would be you then.
What's cool about it: This is a genuinely dynamic piece of artwork that makes us proud to be *Street Fighter* fans.
What's naff about it: This really should have been a massive picture of Hugo doing his Gigas Breaker super art.
Trivia: Hugo is Darran's favourite character and bouts still take place in the **Retro Gamer** offices. Sadly, Darran's trademark move of constantly spinning the D-pad in order to pull off Hugo's Gigas Breaker is so loud and ineffective that he's earned the name of 'Button Masher Jones'.

RETRO GAMER DIARY

THINGS TO LOOK FORWARD TO...

EVENT HOSTING RETRO GAMER
IF YOU WANT RETRO GAMER TO PROMOTE UPCOMING GAMES AND EVENTS, CONTACT US AT RETROGAMER@IMAGINE-PUBLISHING.CO.UK

Just because **Retro Gamer** looks to the past, that doesn't mean there aren't any games and events to look forward to. Every month we'll be listing suitable games and events for you to add to your 'to do' list



SEPTEMBER

SEGA RALLY

Released: 28 September

Publisher: Sega

Price: £49.99

Format: Xbox 360, PlayStation 3, PSP

No doubt you're looking at this entry and asking yourselves why we're covering a brand new game. Well, it's quite simply really. While *Sega Rally* does indeed feature next-gen visuals, ground deformation and online play, it also plays just like the 1995 original. Indeed, just the thought of playing the PSP version is getting Darran all excited, and he just sits at his desk making revving noises.



SEPTEMBER

GEOMETRY WARS: GALAXIES

Released: 28 September

Publisher: Vivendi Games

Price: £34.99

Format: Wii, DS

It's not often that we admit to being wrong, but it's become blatantly obvious to us that the Xbox Live version of *Geometry Wars* was actually far better than *Bankshot Billiards 2*. Anyway, now that's off our chests, we can start getting hyped for the impromptu sequel, which features more levels, more visuals and well... more everything.



OCTOBER

VIRTUA FIGHTER 5

Released: October

Publisher: Sega

Price: £49.99

Format: Xbox 360

We always suspected that the 360 version of Sega's amazing beat-'em-up would feature online play and quite frankly we can't wait to take everybody on online. It may be sporting a fair few polygons since its arcade debut in 1993, but the incredibly deep gameplay that has won the franchise millions of fans still remains. Our GamerTag's Mark Owen if you fancy having a game.



OCTOBER

SONIC RUSH ADVENTURE

Released: October

Publisher: Sega

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

The original *Sonic Rush* turned out to be a brilliant little platformer on the DS, and if you read our review on page 97 you'll see that we think this brand new sequel is even better. Despite looking extremely similar to the original in places, *Sonic Rush Adventure* ups the ante by delivering interesting new gameplay mechanics and some satisfying boss battles.



OCTOBER

FINAL FANTASY TACTICS: THE WAR OF THE LIONS

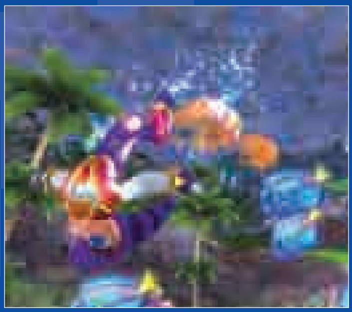
Released: 26 October

Publisher: Square Enix

Price: £34.99

Format: PSP

We've only just covered Square's PlayStation remake in the news and it's already received a release date. Brilliant. If you're a fan of strategy role-playing games, then prepare for a treat, as the original *Tactics* was one of the best. Fingers crossed that the enhanced visuals, new dungeon, and enchanting looking cut-scenes will help win this classic game plenty of new fans.



NOVEMBER

NiGHTS: JOURNEY OF DREAMS

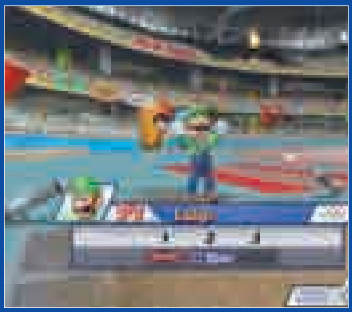
Released: November

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: Wii

Ever since Sega revealed it was working on a new *NiGHTS* game, we've been prancing about like love-sick teenagers. The original Saturn game was a superb title that never reached the audience it deserved, so hopes are high that the high install base for the Wii will more than make up for this. We've not had a chance to play it yet, but once we do you'll know all about it. We can't wait!



NOVEMBER

MARIO & SONIC AT THE OLYMPIC GAMES

Released: 30 November

Publisher: Sega

Price: £34.99

Format: Wii, DS

We waited years for Mario and Sonic to appear in a game together, but we never expected it to be a sports title. Still, now we're over our initial disappointment – surely Sonic will win every race? – we're actually looking forward to the duo's first game. If Sega is able to capture the magic of the likes of *Hyper Sports* and *California Games*, this could well be a sleeper hit.



DECEMBER

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: PHANTOM HOURGLASS

Released: December

Publisher: Nintendo

Price: £29.99

Format: DS

The Japanese version is out and has already recevied rave reviews, which is making us very, very excited. While *Phantom Hourglass* features a similar graphical style to *The Wind Waker*, it's set to make full use of the DS's unique abilities, allowing for some competitive play against another DS owner. Expect the definitive review in a future issue of the magazine.

THE RETRO FORUM

HAVE YOUR SAY… SEND US A LETTER OR MAKE YOURSELF HEARD ON THE ONLINE FORUM – WWW.RETROGAMER.NET



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STAR LETTER!

WHAT THE… ?

Dear Retro Gamer,
Why is the BBFC getting so upset about *Manhunt 2*? Granted, I've obviously not played it, but from the videos I've seen, it seems no worse than some of the films I've seen recently. *Hostel II* for example (as well as being a terrible film) is probably the goriest movie I've ever seen, and yet there's nothing stopping me from seeing that. I can appreciate that videogames are far more interactive, but as adults we should be able to make our own decisions about what is and what isn't healthy for us to watch and enjoy.

It seems the media is always getting in a tiff about violence and pornography in videogames, but it's nothing new. *Carmageddon* was banned a decade ago (and eventually reinstated), *Custer's Revenge* on the Atari 2600 featured erections and rape, of all things. The advent of 16-bit technology has meant we can watch dubious movie clips on our Amigas and STs. Sex and violence in videogames has been around since gaming began, and it's unlikely to go away. Just accept it.

James Harris, via email

Thanks for the letter, James. It's rare that the BBFC has stop a game from being released, but from what we've heard, it is very graphic. However, you're right, it's frustrating that there is still this stigma attached to videogames. Unfortunately, it's unlikely that it's going to go away anytime soon. So, treat yourself to a **Retro Gamer** *binder while we get back to our… ahem, Atari ST…*



» What *Custer's Revenge* would look like today…

MY EYES, MY EYES!

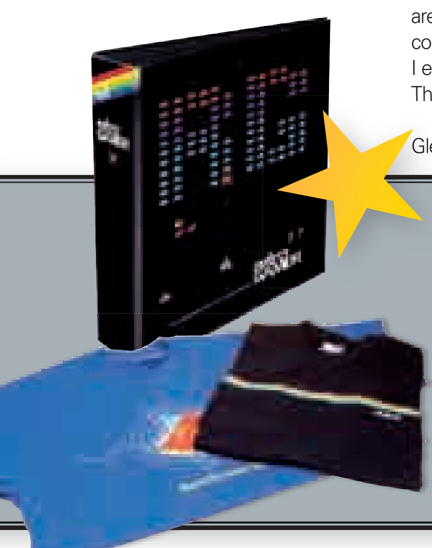
Dear Retro Gamer,
Just a little request, please use screenshots from a real N64 and not from an emulator… Am I getting a bit too pedantic in my old age? Probably, but I just can't look at the shots in super-clear hi-res-o-vision. My nostalgic brain does not compute. Maybe you are going to correct me by saying that they are actual N64 console screens, and it was a combination of rubbish leads and bad TVs that I endured all those years ago…
Thanks gentlemen!

Glen Parry, via email

Hi Glen, you're not the only person to comment on last month's Blast Corps *screens, so we feel your letter deserves answering. The N64 did suffer from poor video output, and we just wanted to show Rare's game in the best possible light. Still, we can see how these images could deceive readers, so in future we'll try to show N64 games in the correct resolution.*



» Glen doesn't want to see screenshots like this in Retro Gamer. Make yourself heard on the forums if you agree or disagree.



EVERY MONTH ONE lucky reader will receive an extremely trendy **Retro Gamer** T-shirt (thankfully, not one worn by Darran) and a snazzy new **Retro Gamer** binder. All you have to do is present a lucid, thought-provoking piece of literature that melts our souls. Failing that, something funny with swear words in it will go down just as well…

MORE, MORE, MORE

Dear Retro Gamer,
I've been a subscriber to both **games™** and **Retro Gamer** now for a great many issues and I regularly re-read past articles on hardware and software titles. I now have a love for Konami's *Space Manbow* thanks to **games™**, but I have been concerned that recent issues of **Retro Gamer** are a little too thin for its £4.99 price tag. All the content seems intact but I find that I've polished off all the articles in a weekend. This can't be right…

I'm really looking forward to the Capcom Play System article as little has been documented on the arcade board, despite the excellent (if small) selection of software titles. It certainly made the best use of the *Alien Vs. Predator* licence.

I would love to see a mini mag come with **Retro Gamer** featuring articles from around the world, as it could look a little deeper into the world of retro games and free up some space in the main mag.

Sorry about the moan, I love the magazine. It's just that I remember *Edge* magazine's 'fall from grace'.

Steve, Derby

We're sorry that you are finishing the magazine so quickly. Is it because there's nothing in there catching your interest? As for your idea about a mini magazine… It's a really nice thought, but considering the effort that it takes Darran and the team to get the magazine completed on time, having to write additional content would probably kill them, and no one wants that. Do they?



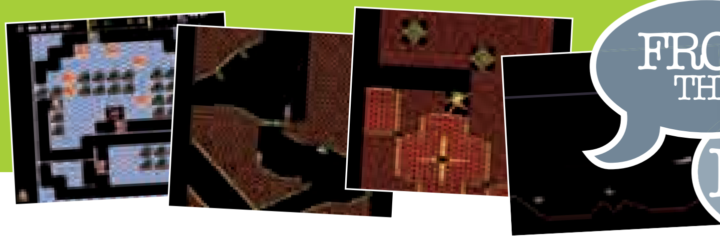
» *DarkStalkers*: Was just one of the great games to use Capcom's CPS-2 board, discover others on page 82.

I'VE SEEN THE LIGHT

Dear Retro Gamer,
I just wanted to take this opportunity to thank all the staff at **Retro Gamer**.

Before picking up your magazine for the very first time this month, I believed that consoles didn't go back that much further than the time of *Sonic The Hedgehog*. How wrong I was…

I had heard of such mystical machines as the Atari ST and Commodore 64, but besides the odd fleeting memory of playing computers with chips instead of cartridges when I was young, I have no recollection of these machines whatsoever.



FROM THE FORUM

EVERY MONTH, RETRO GAMER WILL BE ASKING A QUESTION ON THE FORUM AND PRINTING THE BEST REPLIES. THIS MONTH WE WANTED TO KNOW WHAT YOUR FAVOURITE BBC GAME WAS

ID: The Master
Repton, *Elite* and *Granny's Garden*. (I'll get my coat…)

ID: markopoloman
Didn't play much on the old Beeb – but I do remember at school there was a game where you controlled a ship that looked just like the Liberator from *Blake's 7*. I would drift off and imagine I was Avon.

ID: Forestville
It's got to be *Mr Ee!*, awesome arcade game on the BBC, that I played during school dinner times. I liked the chunky bright graphics. The sound was pretty good too.

ID: yethboth
Granny's Garden. Me and my friends loved that game big time in primary school.

ID: paranoid marvin
The Adventure Game of course – on Beeb 2. Gronda, gronda!

ID: Sabreman
Exile. Absolutely no contest. Not only the best BBC game, but one of the best games ever made.

ID: djcarlos
I loved the old Acornsoft rip-offs… *Arcadians*, *Hopper* and *Meteors* were the ones I played the most. Can you guess what they were based on? Can you?

ID: yesman
Karate Combat, by Martin Sykes (for Superior Software) was a great fighting game. I could never get past the seventh computer opponent, mind.

ID: The Last Ginja
The BB what?

ID: kiniki
Repton, without a doubt. I played it till my eyes bled. Which was a tad uncomfortable and upset my grandparents.

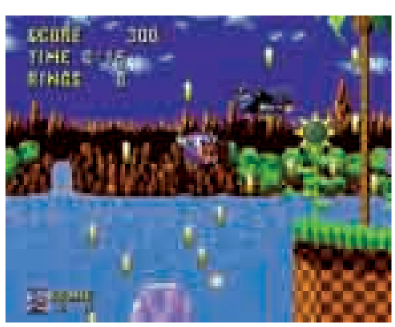
ID: chewy
Geordie Racer. It was a tie-in with a BBC Schools programme. I first played when I was about seven. It was probably rubbish, but I loved it. Playing games instead of doing real work was great.

While reading the current issue it became apparent to me that I was a complete idiot. I had recently stated in an interview for a HNC Computer Games Development course that I was a retro gamer. However, I now realise that I know little to nearly nothing about the actual history of videogames.

Therefore, I thank you for the 'golden' knowledge that you folks are writing about each month and can't wait for the next issue.

Gerrard Scott, via email

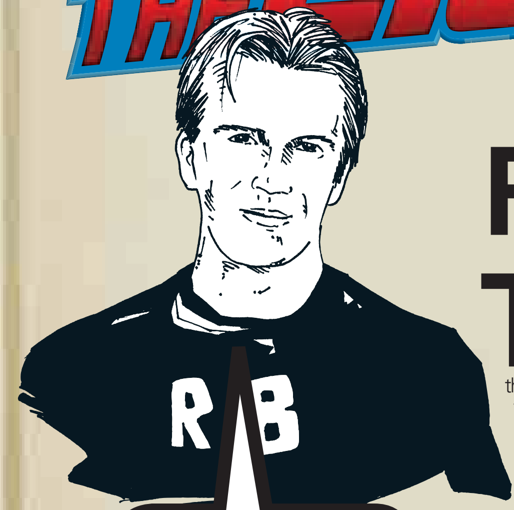
Welcome aboard the good ship **Retro Gamer**, *Gerrard. It's always nice when we hear from new readers, and we're glad that you're finding the magazine so fascinating. Expect even more retro goodness over the next few months.*



» Many are still of the opinion that *Sonic* was one of the first-ever videogames. It wasn't.

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BACK TO THE EIGHTIES



THE LATEST NEWS FROM OCTOBER 1983

October 1983 – a time when newsagents were awash with new magazines, Chuckie Egg was laid, Quicksilva got friendly with giant ants and bouncing fleas, and Atari took a huge financial kicking. Richard Burton makes it his pleasure to us back to the Eighties

The Acorn Electron starts appearing in computer stores, and Database Publications wastes no time producing the first Electron-specific magazine. The fact that the computer could get a magazine solely for its users within months of launch was testament to predictions for Electron's success.

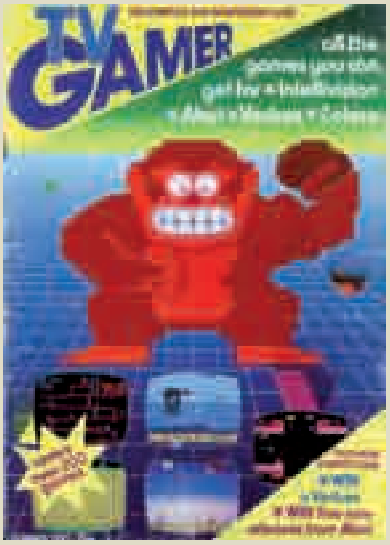
Although only 16 pages long, the magazine featured reviews of converted games such as *Meteors*, *Starship Command* and *Monsters* – all by Acornsoft.

The rise in C64 owners following the machine's latest price cut was seen as an opportunity for Paradox Group (producer of *Vic Computing*) to add another new periodical to the newsstands. *Commodore User* was full of hardware, programming and type-ins for the bulk of its content with no software reviews at all in the first issue.

TV Gamer, a new quarterly publication, made its summer debut with an avalanche of reviews for consoles of the time. That meant pages of games for the Atari 2600, Colecovision, Vectrex and Intellivision – something no other magazine offered. The magazine gave special praise to the likes of *Hyperchase* (Vectrex), *Pitfall!* (Atari 2600), *Zaxxon* (Colecovision) and *Gorf* (Intellivision).



» The first issue of *Commodore User* arrived this month, combining the now defunct Vic Computing. Just hope you like type-ins…



» *TV Gamer*, a new magazine targeting consoles rather than computers was launched this month.

Hot on the heels of the first tape-based magazine, *Spectrum Computing*, came *16/48* published by Magnetic Magazines. Featuring the usual reviews, tips and news, it also promised original games. They were indeed original and were also quite awful.

With software sales going through the roof, Imagine Software required 30 programmers. Based on their experience they could earn between £6,000 and £10,000 a year, according to operations director Bruce Everiss.

The quality of software improved throughout the year, and with the introduction of companies such as Ultimate and titles like *Manic Miner* selling by the bucket load, new releases needed a bit more oomph than the usual production-line *Pac-Man* clones. October saw the release of several such games that can still be considered classics today.

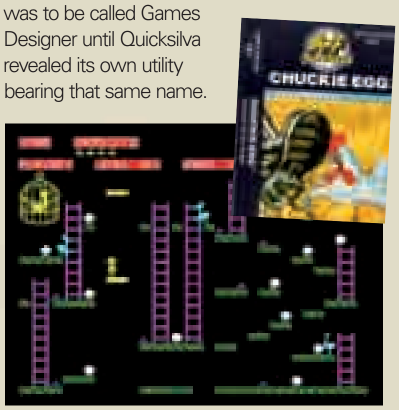
Take *Chuckie Egg* by A'n'F Software: newly released on the Spectrum with any number of conversions lined up for other machines, the fast-moving, egg-collecting platform game was a unanimous hit.

Quicksilva, which tended to release its wares in waves rather than one at a time, did it again with ten new titles ready to hit the shelves. Among the mediocrity of *Quintic Warrior, Purple Turtles, Ring of Power, Trax* and *Gridrunner* were two rather better games. Licensed from Indescomp for the Spectrum was *Bugaboo (The Flea)* and a game featuring something called 'Softsolid 3D', a patent-pending game design technique that created 3D surroundings. The game, *Ant Attack*, would feature a 3D walled city called Antescher inhabited by over-sized ants. It was the first game that let you play as either sex.

Quicksilva was also in the news after a customer complained to the Advertising Standards Authority that one of its adverts stated there would be a "Free universe with every tape (offer subject to availability)". Man, there are some nutters out there…

Another impressive game was *Valhalla* by Legend. A graphical adventure with multiple characters to meet and interact with, it had a huge landscape and came complete with an equally sizeable manual. Described by some as a liveable movie, the game saw your character respond to your typed actions and with six quests to master and plenty of landscape to explore, *Valhalla* looked set to give the Melbourne House adventure, *The Hobbit*, a run for its money. Price? £14.95.

Melbourne House also began advertising *HURG* (High-level, User-friendly, Real-time Game designer), a Spectrum utility that let you create your own gaming masterpieces. It was to be called Games Designer until Quicksilva revealed its own utility bearing that same name.



» *Chuckie Egg* (Spectrum): The egg-collecting, bird-dodging platform game deserves a place in the Hall of Gaming Fame.

1983

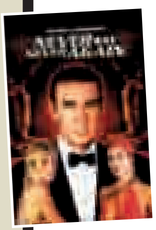


» A cruise missile in all its glory. A lot of moustachioed women congregated around Greenham Common because they didn't like these.

OCTOBER NEWS

24 October saw the start of the trial of Dennis Nilsen, one of the UK's most infamous serial killers. Although Nilsen was being tried for six murders and two attempted murders, he later told police that he had murdered 15 victims. In most cases, he had strangled the male victims and hidden the bodies under the floorboards later disposing of the bodies by burning or cutting them up into small parts and flushing them down the toilet. When neighbours complained of a foul smell coming from the drains, workmen found the remains of three bodies and Nilsen was arrested shortly after.

The Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament staged its biggest ever march on 23 October when an estimated two hundred thousand people descended upon London for a demonstration against stock building of Pershing 2 and cruise missiles at UK military bases such as Greenham Common. This was in response to the perceived growing military threat from the Soviet Union. There were further marches across Europe with around six hundred thousand people in west Germany protesting against Cruise missiles being brought into their country in December.



» Syrup of fig, rug, toupee, head carpeting, oil rig – there's no getting away from the fact that Connery's Bond was a slaphead.

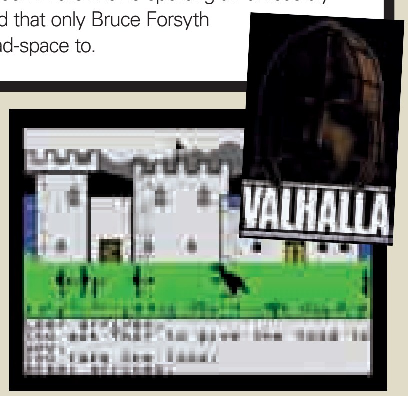
Bond movie, *Never Say Never Again*, premiered in America and stayed at number one for the entire month. Thatsh fantashtic newsh Mish Moneypenny. Commander Bond, played once again by Sean Connery, could be seen in the movie sporting an unfeasibly unrealistic toupee, the kind that only Bruce Forsyth would consider giving head-space to.

So you could code your own games from the comfort of your own bedroom. Fame and fortune would surely follow. Sadly not. The major drawback for *HURG*-created games was that you couldn't load them independently from the utility, resulting in a very limited audience for your creation. Another dream dashed on the colour-blocked rocks of despair. On a lighter and more compatible note, Melbourne House converted and released the *Horace* games – popular on the Spectrum – onto the Commodore 64 and Dragon 32.

The bad vibes attached to Atari continued with a dreadful set of third quarter financial figures. The company had lost $180.3 million – impressively poor by anyone's standards. Still,



» How optimistic do you nedd to be to believe you'd get a free universe with each game purchase? Effing bonkers.



» *Valhalla* (Spectrum): Legend's attempt at an interactive adventure worked well but was hampered by its difficulty level.

it would cheer up all those Atari had tried to sue in the preceding months. Every sprite-like cloud has a pixelated silver lining.

A long time ago in an arcade far, far away, *Star Wars* finally appeared thanks to Atari. Prepare to be relieved of bags of ten pence pieces to get the chance to fly an X-Wing down the Death Star trench and destroy it by firing a torpedo down the exhaust port.

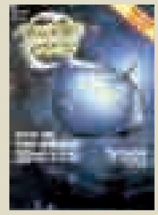
So, what new games were out in October 1983? You might want to buy a magazine…

Which Micro? & Software Review covered *Aquaplane* (C64, Quicksilva), *Killer Gorilla* (BBC, Program Power), *Blue Max* (Atari 400/800, Synapse Software) and *Hall Of The Things* (Spectrum, Crystal Computing).

Computer & Video Games featured reviews for *Krazy Kong* (Vic-20, Anirog), *Painter* (Spectrum, CDS Microsystems), *Hover Bovver* (C64, Llamasoft) and *Hopper* (BBC, Acornsoft), among others.

Popular Computing Weekly weighed in with *Cyclon Attack* (BBC, A'n'F Software), *Mad Martha II* (Spectrum, Mikro-Gen), *Starfighter* (Oric, Durell Software) and *Zombie Mambo* (TI99/4a, Stainless Software).

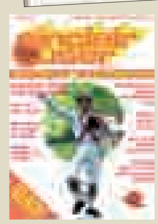
THIS MONTH IN...



Computer & Video Games

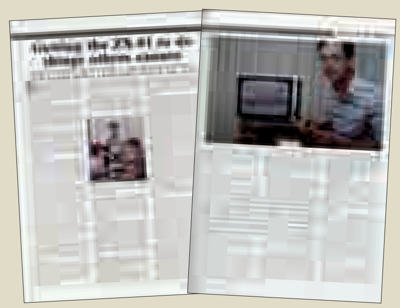
C&VG entered 3D territory this issue with several type-in listings that were supposed to work in conjunction with the 3D glasses taped to the cover. Although the concept was interesting and worked well, what was more interesting was that the type-ins were the creation of Mike "*Lords Of Midnight*" Singleton.

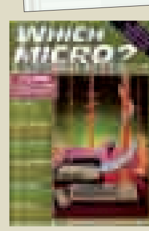




Sinclair User

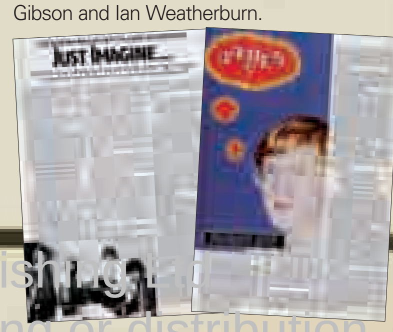
In *SU*'s regular slot of slightly quirky Sinclair owners, October featured Robert Entwistle. When he's not splicing together two keyboards onto one ZX81 for ease of gaming in two-player games he's out Morris dancing, flicking hankies and banging sticks together. He's also very fond of playing the concertina.





Which Micro? & Software Review

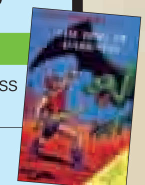
As well as reviewing the 'complete package' Coleco Adam, *What Micro?* featured an interview with Imagine Software's Dave Lawson and Mark Butler, plus an insight into lead programmers Eugene Evans, John Gibson and Ian Weatherburn.



CHARTS

OCT 1983

DRAGON 32



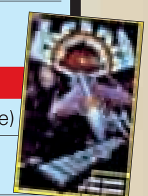
1 Ring Of Darkness (Wintersoft)
2 Night Flight (Salamander)
3 Mined Out (Quicksilva)
4 Frogger (Microdeal)
5 Talking Android Attack (Microdeal)

SPECTRUM



1 Jet Pac (Ultimate)
2 Flight Simulation (Sinclair/Psion)
3 Manic Miner (Bug Byte)
4 Tranz Am (Ultimate)
5 Scrabble (Sinclair/Psion)

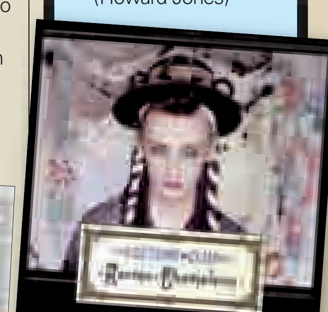
VIC 20



1 Arcadia (Imagine)
2 Skyhawk (Quicksilva)
3 Gridrunner (Llamasoft)
4 Panic (Bug-Byte)
5 Wizard & The Princess (Melbourne House)

MUSIC SINGLES CHART OCT '83

1 Karma Chameleon (Culture Club)
2 Modern Love (David Bowie)
3 They Don't Know (Tracey Ullman)
4 Dear Prudence (Siouxsie & The Banshees)
5 New Song (Howard Jones)



BACK TO THE ~~EIGHTIES~~ 90s

THE LATEST NEWS FROM JANUARY 1990



January 1990 – Atari has a Lynx, Nintendo has a Game Boy, Mean Machines arrives on the scene, Zero is three, Nebulus 2 is on the horizon, while Ghostbusters II is in the gutter. Richard Burton consoles himself…

Last month, Atari revealed that only 70,000 units of its new Atari Lynx handheld would be available for Christmas sales in the US. Atari president Sam Tramiel announced it would be buying in enough components to build a million machines to sell through the year.

Nintendo wanted a slice of the market and countered Atari's 1 million units claim, stating that it planned to build and sell 5 million Game Boys by the end of the year, as well as selling 20 million games. With 2 million units already sold in Japan, Nintendo would have to increase that figure.

UK gamers got their first look at both handhelds, at January's Earls Court Toy Fair. No one knew who would triumph as top handheld console. Would it be the bland monochrome Nintendo or the sleek Atari Lynx? Looks can be deceiving…

Dragon's Lair sequel *Escape From Singe's Castle* found itself in many Amiga disk drives this month. It came on six disks with a lot of glossy literature, which was handy for filling time considering the amount of disk swapping you'd be doing. Although only available in the US initially, UK gamers were only a few months behind.



» Lynx looked great and had a colour screen while Game Boy was beige and monochrome. Strange how things turn out, isn't it?



» *Escape From Singe's Castle* (Amiga): The Dragon's Lair sequel was more of the same with Dirk dying every 14 seconds…

Meanwhile, UK gamers could fill the waiting time with ReadySoft's other offering, *Space Ace*, which was readily available. Following the adventures of Space Ace as he attempts to rescue Kimberley from the nefarious Borf, it had all the animation style of *Dragon's Lair* but never really set the world alight, receiving mediocre reviews across the computing press.

The inaugural 16-bit Computer Fair ran from 12-14 January at London's Royal Horticultural Halls. Prominent software developers were keen to show what they had to offer, running demos in blatant displays of one-upmanship. Sadly, exhibitors and visitor numbers were down on guesstimates given by organisers of the show. Undeterred, the summer show, pencilled in for July, was already being planned.

With the public domain markets for Amiga and ST blossoming, a word of caution was offered by a US company that discovered some of its wares were plagued by the Amiga virus Xeno, which infected software files. It attacks your hard drive destroying all your data.

Cheapo game producer Codemasters revealed that it was planning to release a compilation on CD. Although the Spectrum and C64 versions were almost complete, the Atari ST, Amiga and PC versions would be delayed due to "technical difficulties". Pricing was cautiously set at £20 for the 30-game compilations, although the planned 16-bit versions were all shelved.

Codemasters also repackaged, re-priced and re-released several of its 16-bit Gold Range titles at the budget price of £4.99. The first wave of games included classics such as *Advanced Ski Simulator* and *BMX Simulator*.

January saw an interesting combination of sequels and tie-ins released for the 16-bitters, ranging from the particularly rubbish to the downright awful. *Turbo OutRun* (US Gold, Amiga/ST) failed to inspire, while *Ghostbusters II* (Activision, Amiga/ST) was disappointing on every level. Still, it could have been worse – like *Beverly Hills Cop* (Tynesoft, Amiga). Now there's a game that really should, to use Mr Scary Spice's own words, "get the **** outta here".

There was big news for fans of *Nebulus*, the tower-climbing game. *Nebulus 2* development was announced and furthermore, the game was being programmed under the watchful eye of the original author, John Phillips, working in conjunction with the development team at Infernal Byte Systems. With regards to the game, the main character, Pogo, would have another 16 towers to ascend, along with a new flying bonus stage. *Nebulus 2* was set for a summer release on the Amiga and ST.

Meanwhile, PC gamer's heads would roll with news that Palace Software would be releasing the broadsword wielding classics, *Barbarian 1* and *2*, and also *The Sacred Armour Of Antiriad*. Nice.

You want a magazine? You're in luck… Although not brand spanking new, having already reached the ripe old age of issue three, *Zero* from Dennis Publishing, was another



» *Beverly Hills Cop* (Amiga): Maybe not as pants as *Friday The 13th*, but still one of the worst movie game tie-ins ever.

1990

JANUARY NEWS



» Terry Thomas, the stereotypical English cad could be summed up with just two words: "Ding Dong!"

31 January 1990 saw a very 'happy' day for fast-food loving, Happy Meal-guzzling Muscovites. The first-ever Russian McDonald's opened its doors in Moscow. Vodka McFlurries and Fillet of Turnip were not on the menu…

On 25 January the weather took a turn for the worse. Although the 'Michael Fish Hurricane' of 1987 is better known, the hurricane-force winds and extreme weather on this day caused a greater loss of life in Britain. Trees were uprooted, lorries overturned and building masonry toppled to the floor – a total of 47 people died due to the sheer brutality of the wind – many of them were children.

One celebrity who was fortunate enough to survive the storm was Gorden Kaye who played the inimitable René Artois in BBC sitcom *'Allo 'Allo*. While out driving, a wooden advertising hoarding was blown through the windscreen of his car, leaving him with serious head injuries that required emergency brain surgery. After a significant spell of convalescence, he went on to make a full recovery, bar a dent in his forehead for posterity.



» I'll have a double Kremlin shake, with a KGB burger and hold the turnip. McDonald's arrives in the Soviet Union.

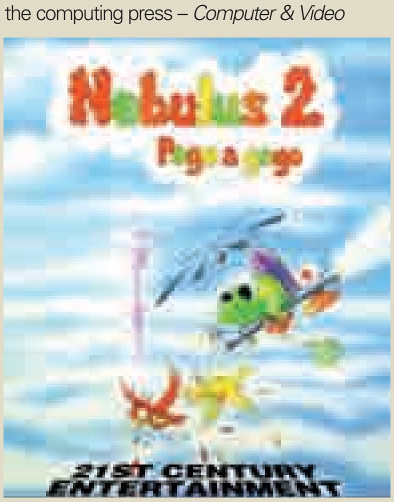
8 January saw the passing of an English icon. The ultimate cad Terry Thomas died aged 78. His distinctive gap-toothed grin, cigarette holder and a top-drawer line in catch phrases, including "You're an absolute shower" and the bounder's all-time classic line of choice – "Ding Dong!" – made the comedy actor a national treasure. I say, what an absolute corker…

entry into the multiformat console magazine market, and jolly good it was too. However, it wasn't quite as new as *Mean Machines*.

EMAP's *Mean Machines* was aimed squarely at console gamers, and saw its first issue released this month. Covering the Mega Drive, Master System, NES and, strangely, the much maligned Amstrad GX4000, it was the console gamer's Bible.

Edited by Julian Rignall, the magazine awarded its top reviews rating, the 'Mega Game', to *Revenge Of Shinobi* (Sega, Mega Drive), *Impossible Mission* (US Gold, Master System), *Golden Axe* (Sega, Mega Drive), *Gauntlet* (US Gold, Master System), *Teenage Mutant Hero Turtles* (Konami, NES) and *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* (Sega, Mega Drive).

Among those reviewed by the old girl of the computing press – *Computer & Video*



» *Nebulus 2* (Amiga): Pogo's back with 16 more towers of choice gaming. Throw in a cute flying stage and you're onto a winner.



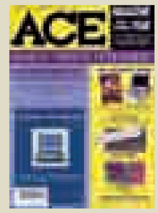
» From the publishers of *Your Sinclair* came *Zero*, another multiformat console/16-bit games magazine.

Games – the games that attained the coveted 'C&VG Hit' mark of good craftsmanship were *Chase HQ* (Ocean, Amiga/ST), *F-29 Retaliator* (Ocean, Amiga), *Dragons Of Flame* (US Gold/SSI, Amiga/ST/PC), *It Came From The Desert* (Mirrorsoft/Cinemaware, Amiga) and *Indy 500* (Electronic Arts, PC). Also coming highly recommended were the Sega Master System games *Psycho Fox*, *Dynamite Dux* and *Rambo III*.

Multiformat magazine, *Advanced Computer Entertainment* had a fistful of gaming gold among its reviews. The highest scorers were awarded to *The Battle Of Britain* (Lucasfilm, Amiga/ST/PC), *Hard Drivin'* (Domark, ST), *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* (US Gold, ST) and *Quartz* (Firebird, Amiga/ST).

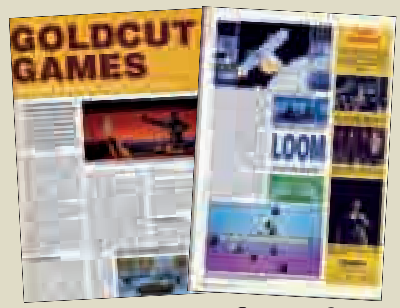
ACE's main competitor, *The Games Machine* from Newsfield, awarded its 'Top Score' award to *F-29 Retaliator* (Ocean, Amiga) with its slightly lesser award, the 'Star Player' being thrust upon *Ghouls 'N Ghosts* (US Gold, ST), *Wonderboy III* (Hudson Soft/Sega, PC-Engine), *Ninja Warriors* (The Sales Curve, Amiga/ST), *Sim City* (Infogrames, Amiga) and *Die Hard* (Activision, PC).

THIS MONTH IN…



ACE

Issue 28 of EMAP's *ACE* magazine (it changed hands from Future Publishing at issue 22) saw an interview with US Gold which had been taking quite a lot of stick for the slapdash quality of some of its recent releases. It promised better with plenty of arcade conversions planned, including ten Capcom games. Lovely.

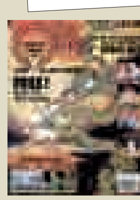




THE GAMES MACHINE

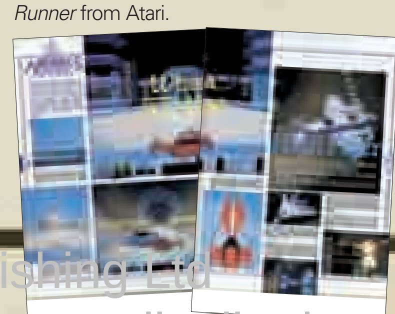
The multiformat magazine had an interesting feature on an add-on for the newly released machine (in Japan at least), NEC's PC-Engine Super Grafx. The Power Console slipped over the top of the Turbo Grafx giving it a joystick, calculator, clock and replay feature among other things.





THE ONE

The ever excellent *The One* featured a brief interview with Ocean Software's David Ward who was dominating the UK, having a huge slice of the software sales pie. A round-up of new arcade games was also out this month, including the eye-wateringly fast twisty-turny racer, *STUN Runner* from Atari.



CHARTS

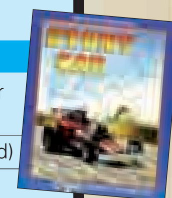
JAN 1990

AMIGA



1 Batman (Ocean)
2 Xenon 2 (Imageworks)
3 Strider (US Gold)
4 Continental Circus (Virgin)
5 Shadow Of The Beast (Psygnosis)

ATARI ST



1 Stunt Car Racer (Microprose)
2 Strider (US Gold)
3 Continental Circus (Virgin)
4 Xenon 2 (Imageworks)
5 Paperboy (Elite)

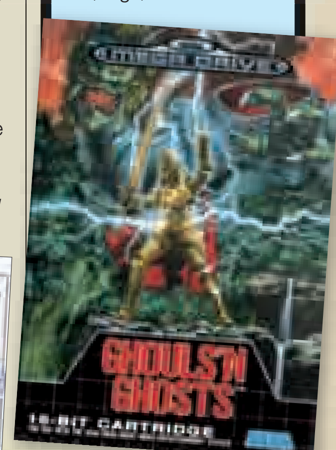


SEGA MASTER SYSTEM

1 Golden Axe (Sega)
2 World Soccer (Sega)
3 Ninja (Sega)
4 California Games (Epyx)
5 Double Dragon (Sega)

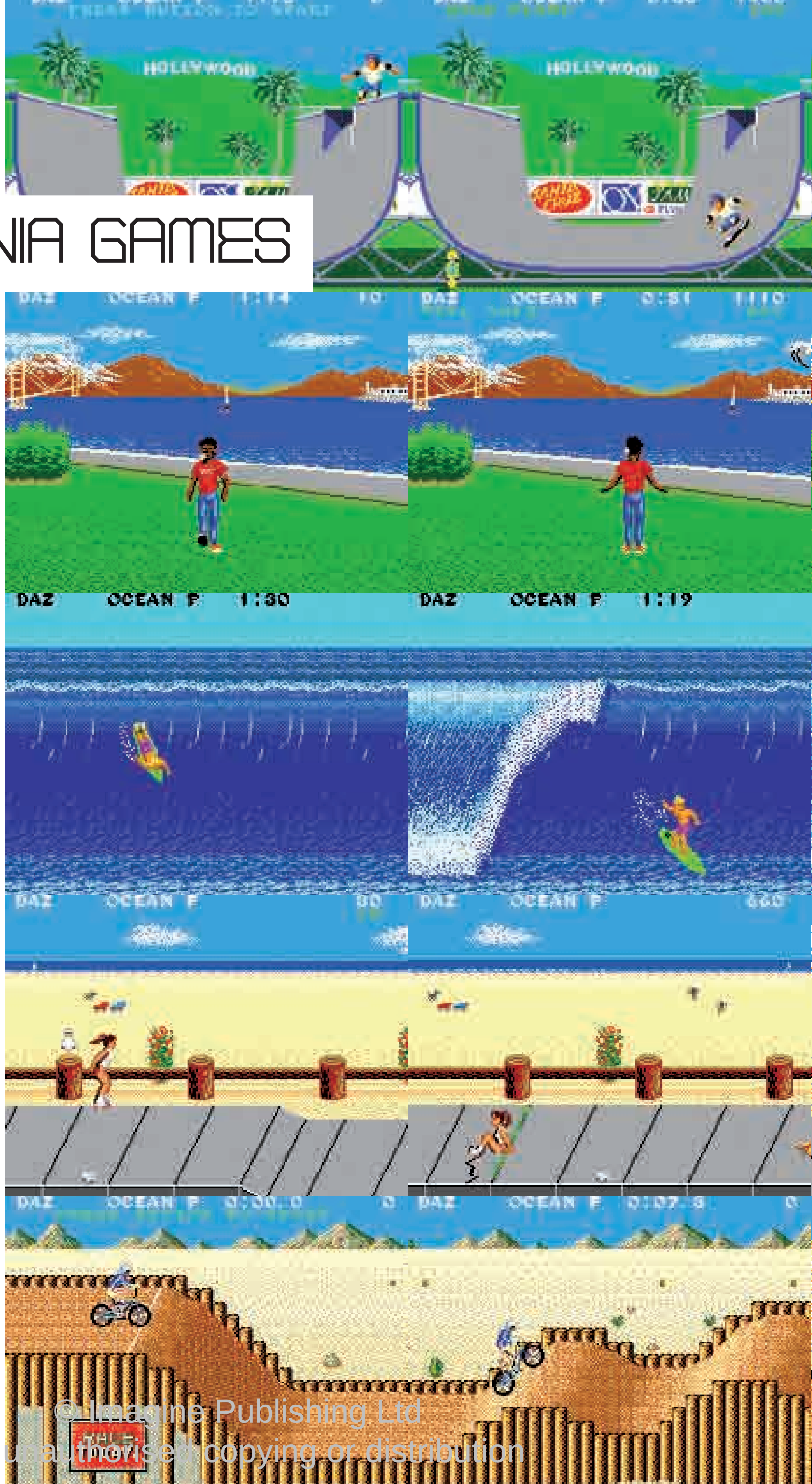
SEGA MEGA DRIVE

1 Golden Axe (Sega)
2 Ghouls 'N Ghosts (Sega)
3 The Revenge Of Shinobi (Sega)
4 Super Hang-On (Sega)
5 Forgotten Worlds (Sega)



CALIFORNIA GAMES

FUN IN THE SUMMER SUN





- **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- **RELEASED:** 1987
- **GENRE:** SPORTS
- **FEATURED HARDWARE:** MASTER SYSTEM
- **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5



HISTORY

In a desperate attempt to hang on to the last few days of summer, we've found ourselves playing *California Games* quite a lot over the past few weeks.

While a new version is on the way for the PSP and Wii, it's the Master System outing that we've been unable to put down. And even today, some 13 years after its UK release; short of heading down to your local beach and smothering yourself in factor 35, it remains one of the best summer experiences you can have.

Arguably one of the greatest titles in the extensive *Games* canon, *California Games* not only did a great job of digitally capturing those long, hot summer days, it also turned out to be a pretty darned good game, which offered a variety of different events to compete in.

Half-pipe had you busting out tricks on a skateboard within a strict time limit; footbag saw you trying to keep your bag in the air for as long as possible; while surfing required you to do nothing more than ride a wave as coolly as possible. Although each of the six events boasted extremely simple play mechanics (no doubt a throwback to *Summer Games*'s 8-bit computer heritage), they were nevertheless extremely fun to play.

While the Lynx version is notable for its link-up abilities, and the Mega Drive outing boasted superior visuals, there's something about playing *California Games* on the Master System that epitomises everything about Epyx's brilliant game.

Visuals are wonderfully vibrant; presentation, while simplistic, offered a variety of different options and allowed you to do everything from choosing specific events to compete in to the naming of your sponsor; while little elements – like being able to hit a passing seagull with your footbag – kept a big smile plastered all over your face.

So the next time it's pelting down with rain and you're feeling all depressed, load up *California Games* and take a sun-drenched stroll down Memory Lane. Just make sure you stay away from the diabolical sequel.


HOLLYWOOD
HOLLYWOOD
700
HOLLYWOOD
DAZ OCEAN F 0:13 4280
DAZ OCEAN F 0:08 4800
DAZ OCEAN F 0:29
DAZ OCEAN F 1:09
DAZ OCEAN F 1:28
DAZ OCEAN F 1:09
DAZ OCEAN F 370
DAZ OCEAN F 220
DAZ OCEAN F
DAZ OCEAN F 0:22.9 300
DAZ OCEAN F 0:34.1 1400
DAZ OCEAN F 0:30.5

The Definitive SPACE INVADERS PART II



THE STORY SO FAR: FOR 13 YEARS, HUMANKIND HAS FOUGHT THE ATTACKS OF THE SPACE INVADERS, AS CHRONICLED IN LAST MONTH'S RETRO GAMER. IT SEEMED THEY'D FINALLY BEEN DEFEATED IN THE EPIC 43-STAGE STRUGGLE OF SUPER SPACE INVADERS '91. BUT WAIT – WHAT'S THAT ON THE RADAR?

1991
SUPER SPACE INVADERS (AMIGA/ SPECTRUM/MASTER SYSTEM)

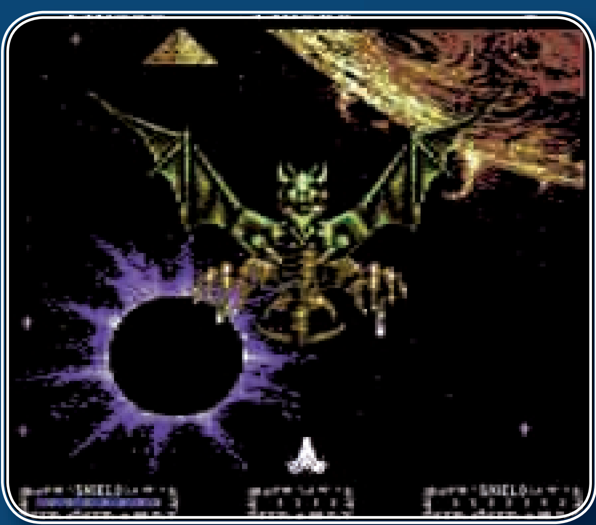
For the sake of continuity, we're going to take a look at the non-arcade versions of Super Space Invaders '91, because they're significantly different from the coin-op. Despite actually coming out in 1991, Domark's home ports dropped the "91" suffix from the name (except the Amstrad CPC, which still has it on the title screen). Secondly, they have different stories - the SMS version had a new plot, setting the game in 2073 rather than the 2091 of the Amiga version and giving your ships different names, while the Amiga version has a long, tongue-in-cheek new intro sequence and funny cutscenes. And thirdly, the Amiga and SMS versions include both the Majestic Twelve and SSI91 structures of the game (here titled Normal and Advanced respectively), giving you the choice of taking branching routes to the end or playing every stage one after the other. (The Spectrum forces you through all the levels in sequence.)

But more importantly, the gameplay itself has been mangled almost beyond recognition. The Amiga version burdens you with a painfully underpowered, slow-firing ship, rendering proceedings more akin to original Space Invaders in pace than the sequel and making some stages (the third, for example) impossible to complete without losing lives unless you get lucky with powerups. The Spectrum and Master System games fare even worse in some respects – their first wave of invaders, for example, comprises just eight columns rather than the 11 of the coin-op and Amiga games, but to compensate for their reduced numbers you only get three defence bunkers and the invader fleet has to drop just FOUR levels to invade you, rather than the 10 of the arcade game. (The Amiga splits the difference with seven, but in another interesting quirk it accommodates the three extra ranks of invaders by dispensing with the gaps between the columns that have been a core element of every SI game ever.) They're broadly more authentic recreations of the original, though, despite the Speccy version being gruesomely slow and lacking all the bosses and the Cattle Mutilation rounds.

Where things get really weird is at the end. None of the home ports can cope with the arcade's final boss stage, so on Amiga and SMS you get a whole new boss with telescopic arms and a variety of attacks. Defeat it on the SMS and the game's over, but on the Amiga you then get a whole extra three-wave bonus stage clearly based on Capcom's influential shooter Commando. Heck knows why – the coin-ops were by different companies, the Amiga versions were released by different publishers, and as far as I can ascertain none of the coding teams worked on both games – but it's there, and you'll just have to deal with it.

» It even contrives to look worse than the Amiga's *Commando*.





» We have to admit that the new bosses are fairly spiffy.

1991
SUPER SPACE INVADERS (C64)

And another separate entry's needed here, because while the Amiga/ Speccy/Master System versions of SSI have various and quite substantial differences both from the coin-ops and each other, they're nevertheless still clearly identifiable as ports of arcade Super Space Invaders. The C64 version, though, is a different kettle of weird-looking fish altogether. When you first load it up, it appears to be a superb conversion, far better than even the Amiga game. The attract sequence and the screen aspect ratio and layout are copied directly from the coin-op, and it's much faster than any of the other ports. (It's also the Majestic Twelve incarnation, with branching stages.)

For the first three waves it seems to be great, until you discover that those three waves represent practically the entire game that was coded. Every subsequent level just repeats three rounds of standard invaders (with occasional appearances from the Expanders of the arcade's third stage) on different backdrops, with none of the circling, diving, shifting, weaving attack rounds of arcade SSI – it's basically just an original Space Invaders that's broken into the sequel's house and nicked all the clothes out of its wardrobe. Most of the special weapons are missing too, with only the Destroy Beam surviving, and for some reason the Mystery Ship is always depicted as the Egyptian pyramid from the coin-op's penultimate rounds. There's one further element of original content, in the shape of an all-new roster of bosses, but otherwise this is a fairly scandalous cut-and-shut job – an entirely decent Invaders clone in its own right, but as a conversion of SSI91 it's shameful.

The Definitive SPACE INVADERS



» The hardware's palette couldn't manage to graduate the colour smoothly from top to bottom, so Taito settled for this rather rubbish banding-and-stippling effect. Note also that the bunkers and Laser Base are white, not cellophaned green as they actually were in almost all stand-up cabinets.

1994
SPACE INVADERS DX F3 (ARCADE)

Shortly after the original arcade release of DX, Japanese gamers were treated to a new version of the same game which ran on Taito's more powerful new F3 hardware (the previous one having used the company's ageing "B System" standard). The only differences noticeable to players were the remixed intro/menu music and the much brighter backdrops in Parody mode, and we're only mentioning it here because DX has so many modes we need an excuse to get another screenshot in.

1994
SPACE INVADERS – THE ORIGINAL GAME AKA SPACE INVADERS '94 (SNES/GAME BOY)

Space Invaders DX would form the basis for SI releases all the way up to 2004's Space Invaders Anniversary, though each subsequent release included some kind of new addition of its own to the core modes. The exception was the SNES port, which is probably the only home release of a Space Invaders game ever to not have some kind of unique feature, unless you count the fact that it was also hidden inside a Game Boy game. If you booted the GB version up on a normal GB, you got a version that was much the same as the terrible 1990 GB port, except with much more authentic sound and slightly improved graphics. Fire it up on the Super Game Boy peripheral for the SNES, though, and things got a lot more interesting.

Firstly you had the choice to play in Super Game Boy mode, which featured the GB game in the three classic colour schemes of the original (missing only the "reflector" mode), set inside a cute screen-surround simulating the original stand-up cabinet. However, if you selected Arcade mode, then you were somewhat startled to see the full-blown SNES release spring to life from the tiny GB cart - it's basically Space Invaders DX minus the Parody mode, with the four graphics options and the same VS game as the coin-op.

1994
SPACE INVADERS DX (ARCADE)

"SPACE INVADERS HAD A GREAT VOGUE IN 1978!", announces the intro sequence, and 16 years later Taito decided to celebrate the game's transition into adulthood by somewhat inexplicably bringing the original version back to the arcades in almost unchanged form. DX is a pseudo-retro compilation, offering a choice between the three classic Japanese colour-schemes: black-and-white, colour, and a very crude simulation of the cellophane-strips version in which the strips are clearly visible onscreen (which of course they never were in the coin-op, because players only saw the images after they'd been reflected through the strips and were never actually looking at the bits of cellophane). In a misguided attempt at humour, the strips don't quite fit flush with each other, leaving a gap where invaders and bunkers stick out from below the fake strips and have one line of white pixels.

On the upside (sort of) you also get a simulation of "reflector" mode - with a rather low-res rendition of the original backdrop painting hard-wired into the game for the first time – and a two-player head-to-head game (more on that later), but the closest thing to a real draw in Space Invaders DX is the Parody mode. This mode played a normal game of Space Invaders but with the graphics replaced by characters and backdrops from nine other Taito games. Titles featured include Bubble Bobble, Rainbow Islands, Arkanoid, Darius and New Zealand Story, and the new graphics give the creaky old game a new lease of life with the urge to see what each successive level will bring.

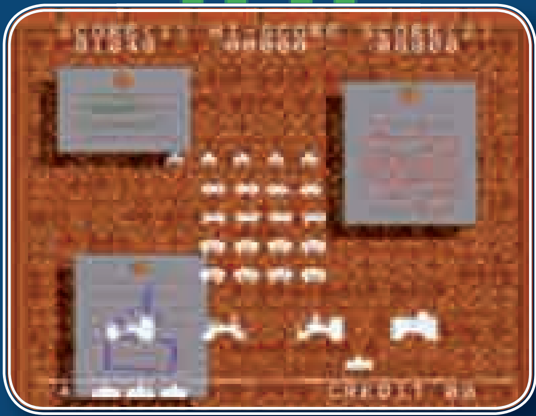


» Parody mode actually looks worse in the F3 version, because the characters don't stand out very well against the brighter background pics.

» The Super Game Boy surround art introduces a bit of a continuity paradox, since in reality there was never a stand-up version of without the reflector backdrop.



» We imagine those are Tomohiro Nishikado's original doodles for the game graphics in the background.



1995
AKKANVADER AKA SPACE INVADERS '95: ATTACK OF THE LUNAR LOONIES (ARCADE)

Conceptually, the next proper SI game was a hybrid of SSI91 and DX's Parody mode. Like SSI91 it has powerups and a defined end, but this is a very tongue-in-cheek game where the five characters you can play as include Harry, a cute little cartoon puppy shooting bones at the invaders from his basket, and Ben-Ben, who is – not to put too fine a point on it – a bright blue turd flying on a urinal and shooting blasts of toilet bleach at the alien hordes. Visually, sonically and in gameplay terms it's very much in the style of Namco's 1991 Galaga spinoff Cosmo Gang The Video (see The Definitive Galaxian in RG 32 for more info).

Despite the title, almost none of the 32 stages take place either in space or on the Moon, preferring instead settings like haunted houses, food factories and tropical beaches. In addition to powerups dropped from the Mystery Ship, your characters all have various secondary attacks and there are odd quirks like your own defence bunkers shooting at you in some of the haunted house levels, which helps keep the player on their toes. As with SSI91, being invaded doesn't immediately end the game, which helps keep this fast-paced and entertaining but fiercely hard Invaders just the right side of completely overwhelming.

1995
SPACE INVADERS VIRTUAL COLLECTION (VIRTUAL BOY)

Nintendo's virtual reality console is one of videogaming's most infamous flops, and one of its odder little twists is that it got a release of one of the world's most ubiquitous videogames, but in such small quantities that it's now one of the rarest commercially-released games in existence. Space Invaders Virtual Collection features six modes - you get normal 2D renditions of Space Invaders and Space Invaders Part 2, versions of each of them in a tilted-forwards 3D perspective that would shortly be seen in many home-console formats, plus Time Attack and Score Attack games. The 3D effect works really well, giving a convincing impression of floating above the lunar backdrop as you fight off the encroaching alien armies, and while it's the same old game at heart it's a real pity that rarity-hoarding tossers prevent more people from enjoying this unique Invaders experience.

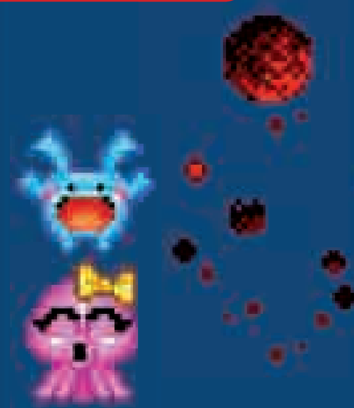
1995/6
SPACE INVADERS – THE ORIGINAL GAME (PC-ENGINE CD/SATURN)

There were two other releases of the collection based on Space Invaders DX, each with their own unique features. The Saturn game had a radically different new VS game in place of the arcade/SNES one, which added thumping techno music, selectable backdrops and modern cutesy-style graphics for the invaders, and the VS mode in the PCE CD version was yet another all-new incarnation with different rules, J-Pop music and cartoon-girl backdrops (in addition to a more sober traditional implementation), though in common with the other-format versions there was no option for a CPU opponent.

But the more interesting exclusive feature of the PCE game was an extra version of original Space Invaders, set against a series of background pictures ranging from cork noticeboards to more cartoon girls to crayon sketches done in a similar style to Yoshi's Island on the SNES. (Going some way to making up for the PCE CD's implementation of the "reflector" mode, which was dog-rough.) Oddly, the Saturn release would go on to be reissued in 1997 in a single-CD double pack edition alongside Puzzle Bobble 2X.



» Again, the first level pays homage to Nishikado's original 'octopus-like' concept for the appearance of the invaders.



» Personally, we would gladly see all rarity-hoarders crushed, encased in cement and buried 50 feet under the New Mexico desert in the legendary landfill of Atari *ET* cartridges. Preferably while still alive, the greedy, sweating, beady-eyed idiots.



1995 PD ULTRAMAN INVADERS (PLAYSTATION)

Retro Gamer readers will recall issue 32's The Definitive Galaxian in which we revealed the existence of the obscure Bandai tie-in *SD Gundam: Over Galaxian*. But it wasn't the only classic arcade title to get a Bandai remake on PSone – *Space Invaders* did too, in an update that's simply crammed with interesting stuff, and it's time the lovely readers of **Retro Gamer** heard about it.



The disc contains both a port of *Space Invaders – The Original Game* and the main *Ultraman* game, which has three main modes (all three of which, share the otherwise-unique quirk of the Amiga version of *SSI91*, in that there are no gaps between the columns of invaders). The main one-player mode is a fairly easy *Invaders* with two switchable viewing modes – standard 2D, and a tilted-forwards 3D scrolling mode superimposed over a slightly tacky 2D backdrop stretched out in the style of the SNES's Mode 7 into unconvincing fake 3D. (Annoyingly, even if you play in 2D mode, the game switches back to 3D to show the last invader being shot, you then have to manually reset the view for the next wave.) You play as various versions of Ultraman as the game progresses through its 19 waves, and all sorts of weird things occur as you play.



There are three Mystery Ships – a normal one, an *Ultraman* one that drops power-ups, and a third one which pops up occasionally to bomb a few invaders for you and can't be shot. The last invader on each stage needs to be shot three times before it'll die, although each hit at least knocks it one level back up the screen. Most waves of invaders line up in a pyramid formation, but now and again there are special levels like Stage 8, where the aliens march straight downwards (like the bonus game in *Cosmo Gang The Video*), or Stage 15, where one very slow invader wanders around waiting to be blasted, finally generating a whole wave of enemies if you take more than 20 seconds or so to shoot it.

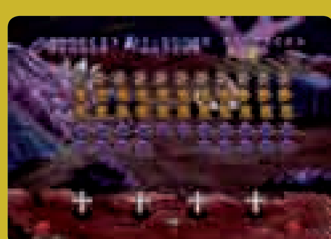


Furthermore, the last invader will sometimes act in very strange and unexpected ways – he might suddenly reverse movement and run away up the screen (in the same side to side pattern as invaders use for descending), or charge directly down towards the ground. Oddest of all, sometimes the invader will be beamed up by a Mystery Ship, only to return alongside six clone projections, which are visually indistinguishable from the real thing. Your bullets pass harmlessly through the fakes, and when you hit the real invader it switches bodies with one of the clones, until you've scored the three hits needed to kill it.

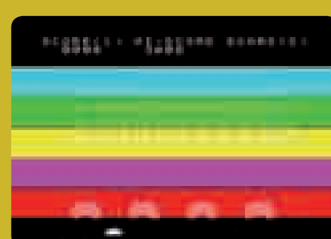




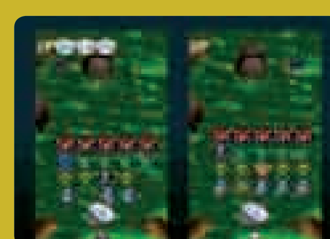
The second main *Ultraman* mode is a score attack game, with no continues. You can choose between nine characters, each of which has its own sound effects and unique order of attack waves (which all appear in traditional *Space Invaders* eleven-by-five formation). The different characters all have their own power-ups, including timed invincibility; *Galaga*-style twin ships; a diagonal bouncing shot which reflects off the edge of the screen and wipes out anything in its path; homing missiles; and a devastating unlimited-use circular saw blade attack which can take out two columns of invaders in one shot. The game appears to be endless, cycling through attack waves until you run out of lives.



The third *Ultraman* mode is a Versus mode, which uses *Ultraman* graphics on top of the same Versus game as is present in the Original Game mode, so let's briefly take a look at *PD Ultraman Invaders'* own incarnation of the coin-op, which is remarkable in its own right. Sadly, it's mostly remarkable for its incredible shoddiness and the sound is inexplicably out of sync, with the trademark heartbeat starting before the invaders appear and continuing after the last one's been shot. Most spectacular, though, is Cellophane mode, in which the invaders are almost invisible behind ludicrously over-thick simulated plastic strips.



The only compensation is that the PS port has five-position high score tables with three-letter name-signing, unlike any of the other ports of *DX*, but it's not enough to rescue this mind-bogglingly dire rendition of the coin-op. (The Versus mode, by the way, in both Original and *Ultraman* incarnations, is exactly the same as the one in the SNES/arcade version, still with no CPU-opponent option.) It's impossible to imagine the thought processes that went through the mind of the deranged, apparently blind programmer who coded that Cellophane mode, though.



PD Ultraman Invaders is a highly inventive take on the original game, with lots more happening than we've had room to cover here (the final mother ship battle in 1P Story mode may drive you mad, but we'll leave its particular twists and turns as a little surprise for any of you who are dedicated enough to get to play it – we wouldn't want to spoil your fun after all that effort), and if you can track down an import copy (and have some way of playing it) then it's a highly recommended purchase for all *Invaders* aficionados.

1998
SPACE INVADERS 2000 (PLAYSTATION)

Taito's Space Invaders department went a little loopy around the turn of the millennium, leading to a tangled mess of misinformation on the internet (no change there, then), so let Retro Gamer clear it up for you – definitively, natch. Firstly, in 1997 they put out a PS1 release of Space Invaders – The Original Game which was an ultra-basic port of Space Invaders DX, lacking even the prettied-up VS Mode graphics of the Saturn version that had come out a year earlier. However, the VS mode itself made a major step forward (see INVADERS WARS).

The very next year they released Space Invaders 2000, which was exactly the same game but with a Time Attack mode added (and also demos of G-Darius and Densha de Go! 2, for some reason). Time Attack mode is a simple challenge in which you have to clear five different formations of invaders against the clock, prettied up a bit with the addition of backdrop graphics for each stage and a slight paintjob on the invaders themselves - it's a nice little extra, but people who paid for the Time-Attack-less version just a few months earlier were well miffed. Three more years later Taito would add further insult to that injury by releasing the same basic code AGAIN, except… well, you'll find out about that one shortly.

» This entry does at least give us an excuse to print a shot of the Time Attack mode.



1999
SPACE INVADERS AKA SPACE INVADERS X AKA SPACE INVADERS EX (PLAYSTATION/PC/N64/GBA)

At the height of the PlayStation's success, retro remakes suddenly enjoyed a brief period in (great) vogue, in some ways seeming to offer a defining image of modernity by taking classic gameplay and dressing it up in state-of-the-art aesthetics. Activision were among the publishers at the forefront of the trend, buying up vintage properties like Asteroids and Battlezone as well as updating the likes of their own Pitfall, but the most ambitious undertaking was to reinvent the biggest game of them all. Space Invaders X (actually only the title of the Japanese release, with the GBA version adding the "E", but we'll use it here for clarity) explicitly sets the game in the Solar System (you start on Pluto and work your way in, Gyruss-style) and bizarrely all but turns Space Invaders into a puzzle game.

How it works is that if you "chain" invaders of the same colour, they release specific powerups (one-shot secondary weapons which take out complete horizontal or vertical rows, diagonal bursts etc), making the player have to think carefully about which is the best order to shoot the invading fleet in - get it right and you can take out an entire wave in five shots. It's a clever idea, but the game's main problem is that even if you don't figure out the most efficient strategy, it's all too easy to blast through each planet's 10 waves plus boss in a few minutes, so generously are you supplied with secondary weapons from chains and additional powerups from the Mystery Ships. The graphics are dark and un-Invaders-y, the pace is rather ponderous for the PS1 generation, and the game wasn't a hit.

» While several gameplay elements are borrowed from *SSI91*, *Space Invaders X*'s other main failing is that it has very little tangible connection with the rest of the series (though a decent-ish version of the original can be unlocked) until you meet the final boss.



The Definitive SPACE INVADERS



» Rather pathetically, this fearsome-looking boss runs away if you shoot off his two little gun emplacements, rather than just crushing you like the bug you are.

1999
SPACE INVADERS AKA SPACE INVADERS X (GAME BOY COLOR)

While ostensibly a version of the Activision game, this has almost no similarities to the other versions except for the name and the box artwork. Despite looking and (especially) sounding like a bad Amiga PD game from about a decade earlier, this isn't a bad little effort, overcoming several attempts by its own developers to ruin it. The double-tap movement system is a monumentally terrible idea, you'll thank God in his heaven for the ability to switch the eardrum-perforatingly dire music off, and wading through 15 waves of invaders for each planet gets very wearying, but hidden underneath all that is a decent basic Invaders game which never lets up (partly due to the size of the GBC screen leaving very little room for manoeuvre and thereby keeping the player always under attack) and has a few fun powerups to give you a fighting chance against the relentless onslaught. Given that there are level passwords anyway, the limited continues are another stupid and pointless inclusion, but at least you can crank them up to nine to minimise the amount of time you spend writing down tiresomely long passwords with a pen and paper.

2001
SPACE INVADERS XL (NUON)

Broadly speaking another port of the Space Invaders DX coin-op, this version for the doomed Nuon DVD player/games machine - the last-ever official release for the console, in fact - offers a real lucky dip of Invaders goodies. In addition to the standard four types of classic Invaders game, there's a Time Attack mode like that of The Invaders but with new graphics (though oddly you can't play the normal game with the new graphics), and the main 1P mode brings back the four core gameplay options from the Atari VCS version (zig-zag bullets, fast bombs, invisible invaders and moving bunkers) for the first time in 20 years. There's also fast and dynamic music for all the non-classic modes, including a variety of tunes from other Taito games like Darius (look for the track called "SCRAB") and obscure vertical shmup Tokio ("DOPEL"), and the same VS game as the Playstation's 1997, "2000" and "1500" versions.



» You'll note we said 'new' graphics, rather than 'improved.'

2001
THE INVADERS AKA SPACE INVADERS 1500 (PLAYSTATION)

This is a very curious release. Put out by D3 Publisher as part of their extensive "Simple Series" budget label, it comprises mostly the exact same code as Space Invaders 2000. (Which makes the subtitle of Space Invaders 1500 very confusing, unless you know that it's a generic suffix for the series, which sold for 1500 yen. Adding to the confusion is the fact that "The Invaders" was actually the name of the most popular bootleg of original SI. But anyway.) For the budget release, though, it was boosted by the addition of a whole new mode, which also happened to be the most substantial and significant updating of Space Invaders in a decade – Space Invaders 3D.

Taking the same basic tipped-forwards viewpoint as the Virtual Boy game, SI3D is in gameplay terms a remake of Space Invaders Part II. Apart from the fact that there are only seven columns of invaders, and the distracting way your defence bunkers flash every time you shoot, it's otherwise the same game as its 1979 ancestor – there are Splitters, Breathers, the flashing UFO alongside the Mystery Ship, the between-level skits and even the rainbow. (Though in a slightly different form – if you leave a bottom-row invader till last, he leaves a rainbow-coloured trail, but when you shoot him, rather than a big multicoloured rainbow flowering across the screen, you just get the word "RAINBOW" printed in giant letters. The power of suggestion, ladies and gentlemen.) You can switch the view between five different positions, right down to a first-person view from inside your Laser Base, and each level is depicted as a colourful grid set over a new backdrop image. If you only get one Playstation version of classic Space Invaders, this is the one to go for.

» The first-person view is surprisingly scary, as well as unsurprisingly hard.





» The graphics are pleasingly atmospheric, though. Well done, artists – if you're still at the same company, please pop over to the gameplay designers' cubicle and kick their faces in. Ta.

2002
SPACE INVADERS: INVASION DAY AKA SPACE RAIDERS (PS2)

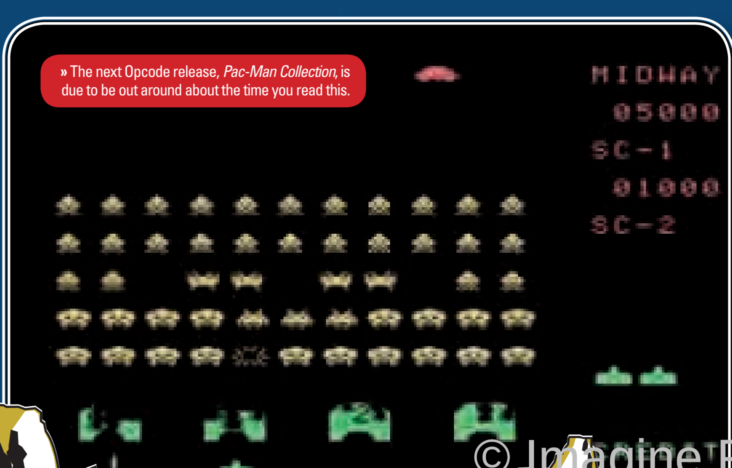
To be honest, *Invasion Day* doesn't really belong in this feature. Originally a totally-unrelated Japanese game called *Space Raiders* developed by Sammy, for some reason Taito decided to crowbar it into the *Space Invaders* universe for the Western release, presumably on the grounds that the plot and the basic left-right-shoot gameplay is sort of like *Space Invaders* a bit, ish. It's a third-person shooter, which takes the Invaders story out of the upper atmosphere and right down onto the streets, where you shoot at the alien monsters with rifles and grenades while hiding behind oil barrels in a back-alley guerrilla war, instead of the altogether more impersonal Laser-Base-and-defence-bunkers approach.

It's hamstrung by awful controls, which contrive to make *Invasion Day* awkward and uncomfortable, by intrusive loading, and by miserably feeble weapons and design which demands the player pummel the fire button around 50,000 separate times (and that's not some figure plucked from the air – I actually worked it out) to plough through about an hours worth of game in Story mode and get to what's actually a rather excellent plot twist at the end. The no-continues Survival game is decent high-score fun, but even then the gruelling bosses conspire to suck most of the enjoyment out of it.

2003
SPACE INVADERS COLLECTION (COLECOVISION/MSX)

And as long as we're blurring qualification boundaries a little, there's this. We don't normally cover unlicenced homebrew stuff in The Definitive (or we'd need the whole magazine), but this release exists in a slightly grey area, and has a very notable feature of its own, so we'll make a semi-exception. Opcode Games (actually just one coder, Eduardo Mello) is a tiny little publisher specialising in converting old games to the Coleco and MSX and selling them (on actual carts, to run on the real machines). The biggest and most complete Opcode project yet is Space Invaders Collection, a comprehensive port of arcade Space Invaders, Part II and Deluxe.

This, of course, makes SIC the only conversion of Deluxe ever released for a home format. When Taito heard about it they got in touch, but according to Mello, "Once they found about the size of the project, they just lost interest and never contacted [me] again". So it's fair to say that SIC has at least tacit approval, and therefore kind of counts as semi-official. In any event, it's a great piece of work, boasting pretty much arcade-perfect graphics and a painstakingly accurate replication of all the differences between Part II and Deluxe, as well as the opportunity to play original Invaders in Japanese-style colour or B&W modes, or the US version's simulated reflector mode with green bunkers and Laser Base (no backdrops, sadly).



» The next Opcode release, *Pac-Man Collection*, is due to be out around about the time you read this.

2004
SPACE INVADERS ANNIVERSARY (PS2/PC)

This 25th-birthday release is basically yet another port of Space Invaders DX, though it has been suitably buffed up to look like something more considerable by putting it in a 3D-arcade front end with all the variant versions depicted as separate cabinets and adding some browsable archive material like flyers and original graphics sketches. There are even two separate versions of Space Invaders Part II, dubbed "upright" and "color", although both of them are in colour and there are no discernible differences between them at all except for the cabinet models. (In a really cute touch, Anniversary lets you zoom in or out to simulate standing closer to or further from the screen, showing the cabinet surrounds or even slanting the display to replicate the real-life viewing angle.)

The main attraction, though, is Space Invaders 3D Mode. This is very similar to the seven-column, multiple-viewpoint 3D game included in The Invaders on PS1, except depicted in crisp, almost-wireframe graphics (with a single simple backdrop) rather than filled polygons, and largely based on original SI rather than Part II – there are Splitters (from level 4 on), but there's no rainbow trail if you leave a bottom-row invader to last, and no bonus when you shoot him. The (single type) Mystery Ship drops power-ups rather than scoring points – a speedup, a double shot and a one-hit shield – and at the start of level 9 your bunkers disappear, but otherwise it's a fairly standard version of *Space Invaders*.

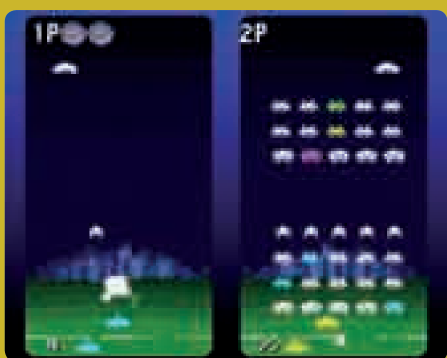


» In another nice tweak, you can play the games amid a cacophony of simulated arcade noise, choosing from other people playing *Invaders* to ten other Taito games including *Bubble Bobble* and *Darius*.

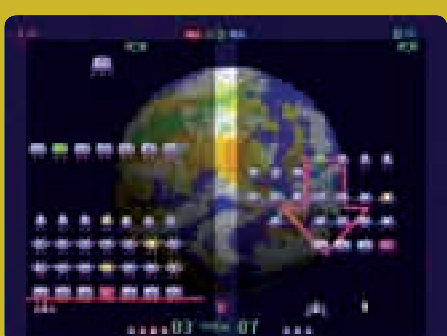
The Definitive SPACE INVADERS

INVADERS WARS

In either a commendable effort to liven up a series of ports with some genuine new content, or a cynical attempt to get completists to buy the same thing over and over again, depending on your viewpoint, practically every variant release of *Space Invaders: The Original Game* had a Versus mode which was very substantially different from the one featured on every other release. Here's how the various implementations of two-player invading go…

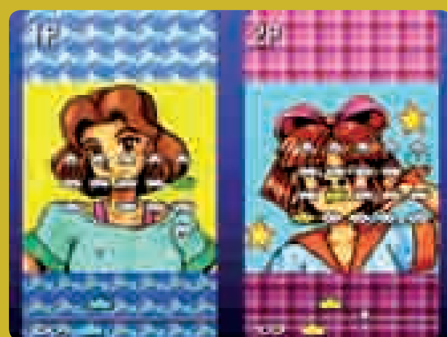


On the SNES the main objective of the Versus game is to get your opponent invaded (though you can also win a round by clearing all the invaders on your side of the screen, as in most of the other versions). Shooting special coloured invaders has various effects – like causing your opponent's (or your own) invaders to descend a level or adding an extra row to the fleet attacking them – but they change colours if you don't shoot them quickly enough. Clearing a row of your own invaders also sends it over to your opponent, *Puyo Puyo*-style. Shooting the Mystery Ship swaps the two invader fleets over, encouraging the cunning strategy of deliberately getting yourself almost invaded, then dropping your opponent in your mess. Players can have independent settings (and therefore handicaps), for both numbers of lives (up to infinite) and invader starting height.



On the Saturn you get modern cutesy-style invader graphics, no bunkers, and your opponent's Laser Base appears at the top of screen where it can be shot – either being invaded or running out of lives will lose the match. There's thumping techno music and three selectable backdrops. Shooting the Mystery Ships now drops your opponent's invaders down three rows, and the special invaders either destroy a whole row, move the enemy invaders down or move both sets of invaders down.

The PC-Engine's Versus game has no opponent at the top of the screen; no bunkers; an infinite-lives option; a

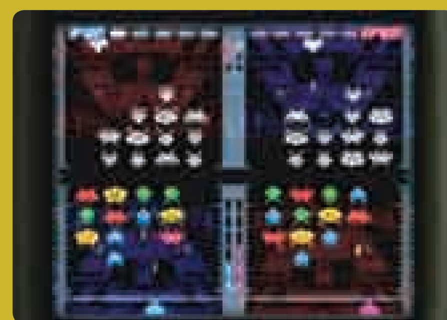


cartoon-girl backdrop (which is 'animated' in extremely rudimentary fashion at the end of a round and the end of the match); J-pop music and different power-ups (eg one that freezes the invaders on your side, and one which slows down the opponent's Laser Base). This time the Mystery Ship swaps the fleets over again.



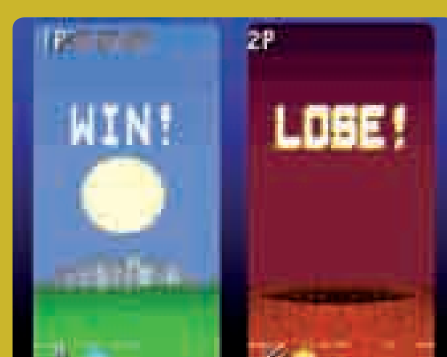
The most impressive aspect of the PS/*2000*/*1500*/*XL* Versus game is that it offers a CPU opponent for the first time (with three difficulty levels), but the game itself is another fairly radical overhauling. Now you're armed with a secondary super-laser which is charged by shooting ordinary invaders and unleashes a big paint-splurge of a shot which passes through invaders without damaging them but robs your opponent (who's at the top of the screen again) of one of his three Laser Bases if it hits it (normal shots have no effect on the opponent).

The Mystery Ship still swaps fleets, and coloured invaders have the same effects as their SNES counterparts, but rather than just having fixed special invaders whose colours change, now the game also switches which of the invaders have that 'special' status, every few seconds. It's much faster-moving and more intense than the previous versions of the Versus game (rounds can be over in a matter of a few seconds), and the various changes make it all but impossible to clear your screen, so this time it's all about getting your opponent invaded or destroying all his Laser Bases (you get a maximum of five lives, compared to 25 on the Saturn and up to infinite on the SNES and PCE). On the Nuon alone, the action is accompanied by a



random music selection from the game's soundtrack (see main entry).

The Versus mode in *Anniversary* is most closely related to the Nuon version, but has very radical differences, starting off by ditching the music again. Even more so than the Nuon game, it's chiefly about shooting your opponent (it's possible to get invaded in *Anniversary*, but you have to try pretty hard). The invaders are mostly there as a source of power-ups rather than a danger – there are only 12 of them, clearing them all just makes another row appear, they don't fire at you, and indeed shooting them is almost counter-productive, since 'your' invaders act as an indestructible shield from your opponent's normal shots. Once more you get a super-laser to attack your opponent with, this time obtained by zapping the Mystery Ship, and now to get the effects of shooting special invaders you have to blast three of the same colour in succession – for example, hitting three blue invaders one after the other generates a new row of attackers on your opponent's side, while three greens gives you another shot for your super-laser (which unlike the Nuon game carries its charge over between rounds). Even though you only get one life per round and either normal shots or the super-laser will take out your opponent's Laser Base, *Anniversary*'s Versus is a tactical and cagey game, and rounds can last a long time.



In all of the different Versus mode variants, these are your two main options.

2005
SPACE INVADERS DS AKA SPACE INVADERS REVOLUTION (DS)

While not as bad as it was generally painted in reviews, this is a confused and depressingly penny-pinching release which could easily have been 200% better with only 10% more effort expended on it. You get a well-implemented classic Invaders option, but mystifyingly it's only available in the very uncommon colour incarnation, with neither mono nor "reflector" options available despite the title/menu screen actually showing the reflector version. (A real pity, as the PSP's Space Invaders Pocket would show how lovely the reflector version would look on the small screen.) You also don't get Part II, or any kind of VS game, which could have worked superbly well on the dual screens across WiFi. (The DS was practically made for a home version of Midway's 1980 release Space Invaders 2 – see last month's **RG** for more details.)

As well as existing for its own rather under-nourished sake, the Classic mode also serves to unlock items for the remake version – as you accumulate points by playing classic Invaders, you make the six powerups for the "New Age" available one at a time. Unfortunately, it's pretty easy to beat the New Age mode with no powerups at all, and since there's no scoring in the updated version, no rankings, no time attacks or anything else, there's absolutely no incentive to go back and play it again once you've collected all the weaponry. It's a real shame, because the 20 varied stages of the New Age game contain lots of imaginative and fun twists on the Invaders theme, and if there was any reason to revisit them after the first run-through the game could have had countless hours of Wario Ware-style replay value. As it is, it's a cynical half-finished rushed-out knock-off job.



» Giant invaders made up of multiple shootable blocks are just one of the fun innovations that are almost entirely wasted in *Space Invaders Revolution.*

2005
SPACE INVADERS: GALAXY BEAT AKA SPACE INVADERS EVOLUTION (PSP)

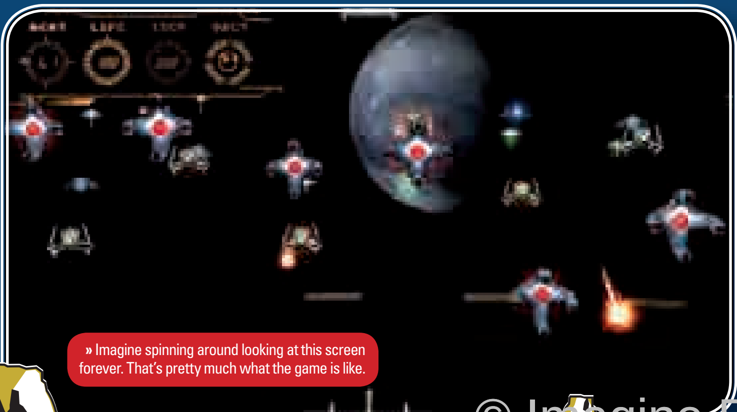
If human beings evolved like Space Invaders Evolution, we'd all have gigantic 20-foot deely-boppers growing out of our eyebrows, but no lungs. And while that would make for a swift extinction and therefore be tremendous news for every other living thing on the planet, it's not a great way to design a videogame. Evolution tacks a stupendously pointless rhythm-action element onto Space Invaders, and then implements this already-dumb idea so badly that by the time players encounter any microscopic semblance of challenge in the game, they're so old that the music appears to them to be nothing but the tuneless thumping of long-haired dropouts that they'd rather write complaint letters to the Daily Telegraph about than hit the fire button in time with. Unadulterated rubbish, sullied further by a truly dire port of original Invaders, and generally an affront to humanity. When you see games like this, you can't help but think we really do need to sod off and give the cockroaches a go.

2005
SPACE INVADERS POCKET (PSP)

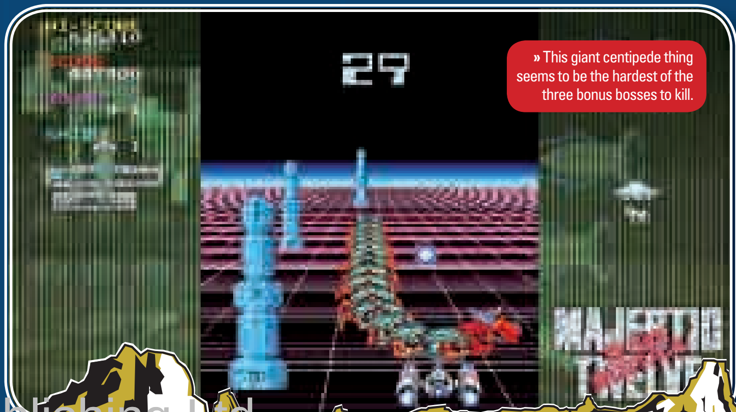
Well, what a 29 years it's been for the first-ever two-part Definitive, eh? But after that string of recent stink-ups, I hope we can end on an upbeat note. So, who remembers the end of last month's Part One of this feature, when we talked about the original version of Super Space Invaders 91/Majestic Twelve and its mysterious missing 3D bonus sections? Because if you do, this fairly comprehensive Japan-only PSP compilation of Invaders games has a little surprise for you, which **Retro Gamer** is proud to now EXCLUSIVELY! reveal to the world. Heck yeah!

In addition to the traditional four Japanese versions of the original game (mono, cellophane, true colour and a rather pretty new take on reflector mode), alongside Part II, Return Of The Invaders and Akkanvader, Space Invaders Pocket includes a port of Majestic Twelve (the SSI91 variant isn't available). But this is no ordinary port. Very very quietly (I've never seen the fact mentioned anywhere, and there are no sneaky screenshot clues on the back of the box), the port of Majestic Twelve on Space Invaders Pocket revives the original never-released arcade version, complete with the 3D boss fights.

If you battle your way through to the penultimate stage without using a continue (pretty easy to do, as the PSP version also seems to have ramped the difficulty down somewhat), then where you'd normally encounter the third Cattle Mutilation round, instead you see the game as it was meant to be. Flying into the screen and dodging onrushing columns, you have 30 seconds to completely destroy one of several boss enemies. (Which you get seems to be random - I've personally seen three different ones, and it's not down to which route you take through the levels.) If you manage it, you get 5000 bonus points for every second remaining on the clock. To be honest, score-wise you'll almost certainly be better off with the Cattle Mutilation round, but that's hardly the point – what matters is that 16 years after the event, you're finally playing the best-ever Space Invaders game the way its designers wanted you to play it. Where would you be without The Definitive, viewers? See you next time!



» Imagine spinning around looking at this screen forever. That's pretty much what the game is like.



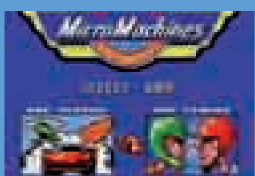
» This giant centipede thing seems to be the hardest of the three bonus bosses to kill.



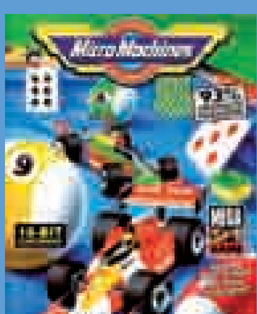
THE CLASSIC GAME
MICRO MACHINES

Like Marble Madness, Micro Machines was a title that dragged a playground-pastime from out of the school gates and onto a television set. Stuart Hunt looks back at a Codemaster's classic, that proved to be a one of the most enjoyable multiplayer experiences ever released on Sega's mega-brick

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** CODEMASTERS
» **DEVELOPER:** CODEMASTERS
» **RELEASED:** 1993
» **GENRE:** RACING
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** A FEW QUID



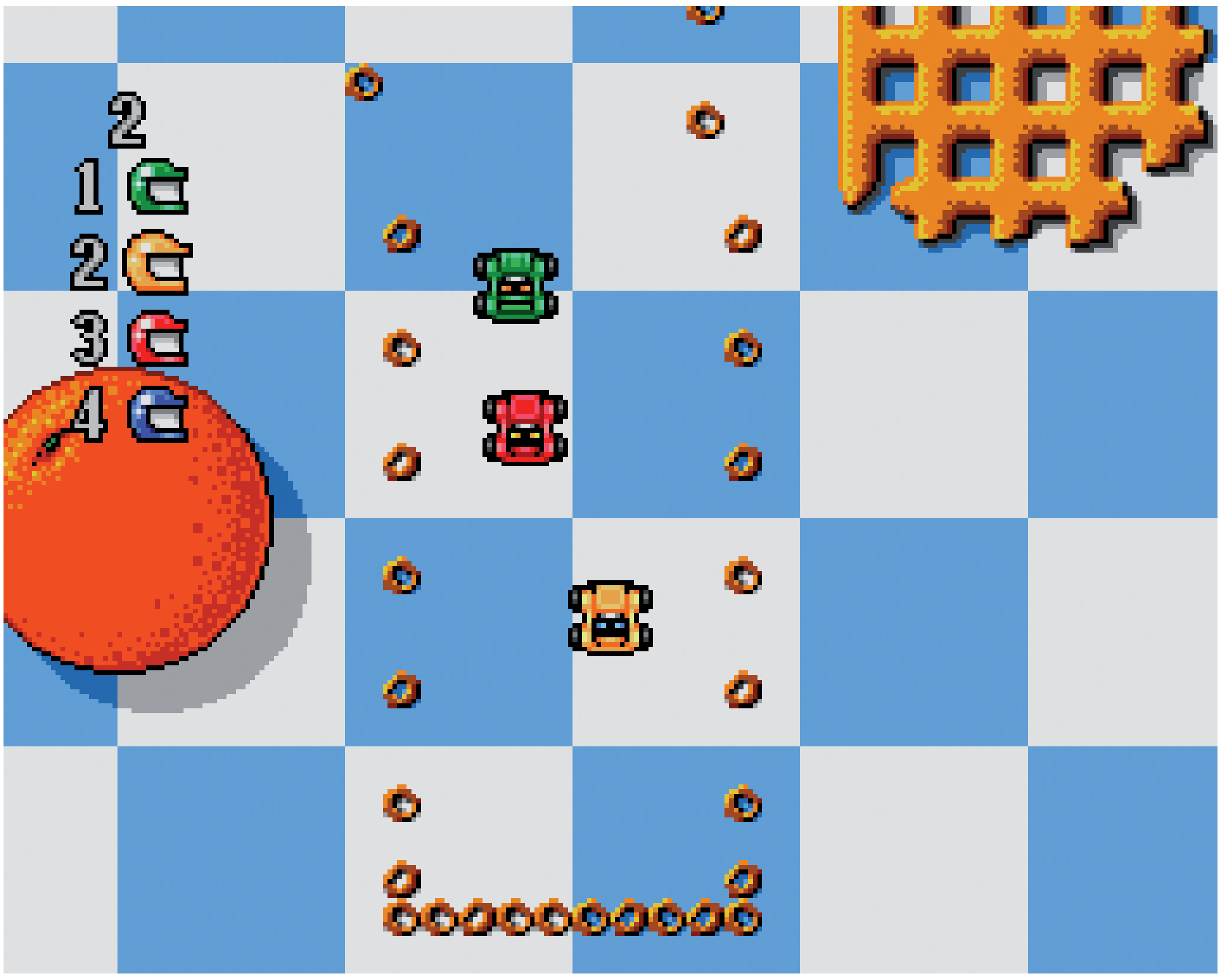




» Poor Mike, not only has he finished last; he seems to have a spot of water in the old ears too.



» One of the more enjoyable sections of this extremely jittery racetrack.



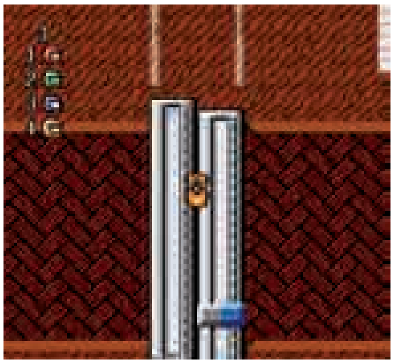
Micro Machines feels so quintessentially Codemasters that you half expect one of the Darling brothers to feature in its colourful roster of cartoon characters. Reminiscent of one of its earliest and most prolific titles of yesteryear, Codemasters proved that the archaic top-down racer still had plenty of gas left in its tank. Carrying a super-charged, 16-bit engine, *Micro Machines* jump-started a rapidly disappearing genre that the master of codes had popularised five years earlier.

Micro Machines' lineage can be traced way back to the release of Codie's first game: *BMX Simulator.* The popular peddler's birds-eye perspective, colourful dirt tracks, and simple controls could have easily played pre-cursor to the *Micro Machines*' eventual videogame spin-off. You could bet your last credit that while Codemasters was brainstorming ideas about where to steer the franchise, the words '*BMX Simulator*' were left ringing in the air once or twice. In retrospect, playing both games now, their similarities shine louder than a Scorpion/Sub Zero fight on a black-and-white telly.

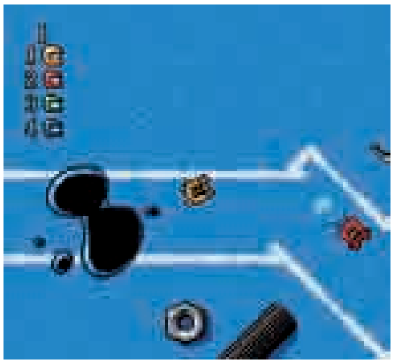
What is essentially a dusted off version of the earlier NES release, the Mega Drive redux of *Micro Machines* made use of its new pimped-out ride, but without being over-showy or graphic-schmoosing. Its premise was delightfully simple, as were its looks, controls and gameplay. While most racing games of its day opted – as best they could – for realism and speed, *Micro Machines* chose to drive skittishly down the wrong lane of a dual carriageway, while carefully dodging gargantuan road-kill.

Codemasters cleverly polarised the game around the point that the cars were 'micro', and as such, the world, as seen through their windscreens, was not. This made for an interesting concept to base a racing game around, and its wonderfully oversized tracks soon won the hearts and pocket money of gamers across the country. Codemasters clung tightly to the key appeal of *Micro Machines* (which, wasn't the fact that you could pretend you were a car-rich giant).

"MUCH OF THE GAME'S CHARACTER AND CHARM COMES CHUGGING OUT FROM THE EXHAUST PIPES OF THE FOUR-WHEELED, MULTI-HUED MITES"



» The perfect bridge for measuring how far you've travelled. Just watch out for that damn eraser.



» Those globs of glue are incredibly annoying, as the red car is about to discover.



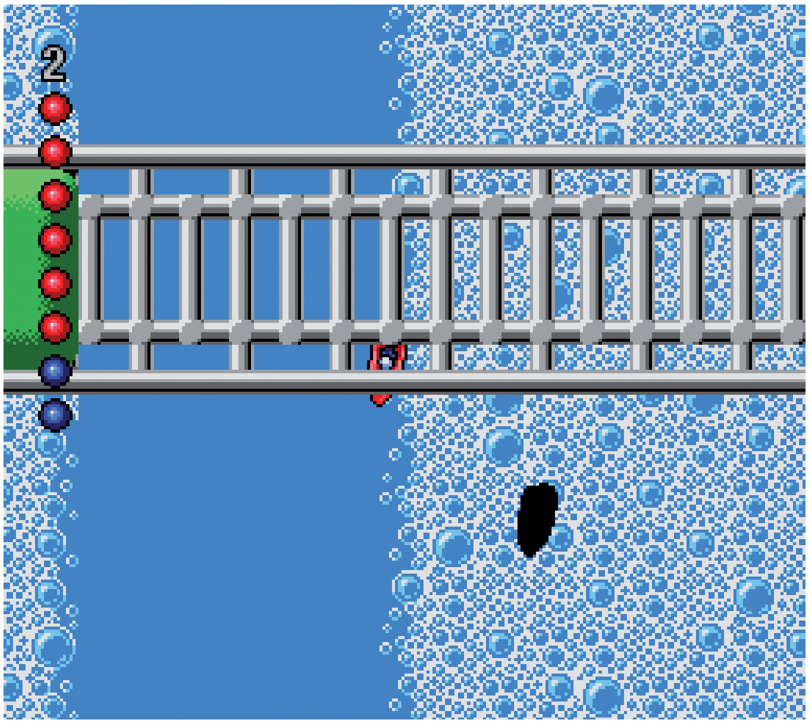
» The dune buggy takes a well-earned dip in the water – shame he's still in the middle of a race, mind.

For the friend-deficient gamer, two very different single-player game modes were introduced. The first was the Challenge mode, which would see you race-off against three other computer-controlled racers of your choosing. The driver with the lowest ranking after three races would be ousted from the competition, leaving you to select one of the remaining characters to take their place. This systematic method of picking-off players meant that a cunning micro-machinist would often leave a few of the less-inept drivers waiting at the starting grid for the later races.

The second option was the Head-to-Head mode, where two racers would frantically try to outrun each other off of the screen. The camera, playing referee, would dish out points to the player who reached the edge of the screen first, and the racer to amass the most points before the race was over would be declared the winner. The Head-to-Head option came into its own in two-player spats, and remains one of the most enjoyable pastimes two consenting adults and a Mega Drive can partake in.

An identity parade made up of 11 wonderfully quirky characters welcome you into the game. Its roster included the slick, shade-wearing Spider; the glamorous Cherry; and pie-predator, Walter. The cool, the forgettable and the avoid-like-the-plague were all present and accounted for. And if looks weren't enough to deter you from picking one the rotund or geeky characters to control in the game, helpful clues about their driving prowess, such as 'able', 'rash', or, in the case of poor old Walter, 'dire', mantle their chirpy profiles.

While the collaboration of oddballs injected a human element into proceedings, it's obvious that the cars were cast as the true stars of the show.



» The red boat is well in the lead, but what's that ominous black shape underneath the water? Could it be… surely not… a stealth boat?

Much of the game's character and charm comes chugging out from the exhaust pipes of the four-wheeled, multi-hued mites. Each one would display its own personalities, idiosyncrasies and relationships with inertia. The sports cars, while extremely quick, were skittish pocket-rockets of concentrated gusto that proved extremely difficult to tame. The muscular 'Warrior' cars, however, were easy to pull around hairpin bends and made easy work of slippery oil droplets.

To couple their individual characteristics, each vehicle was given its own unique racetrack. The four-by-fours contest around a messy breakfast table, with sticky orange juice splodges and cereal-markers shepherding racers around its cluttered racetrack. The aforementioned roadsters shoot around an untidy school desk – complete with bridges made from rulers, and ramps made out of school books – to perform textbook jumps from. While the wonderfully imaginative racetracks were ferociously unforgiving, they proved a true testament to the creative flair of the Warwickshire-based developer.

Codemasters infused a dodgem element into the racing, which would prove an essential factor in generating the appeal of its 'multiplay-hem' action. Drivers could be rammed into oversized oranges, enormous nuts, and even off of the track itself as bullied drivers landed in a puff of smoke and a cacophony of laughter by a smug mate.

Codemasters also touched on the collecting aspect of the *Micro Machines*, with each win earning you a new car for your wooden spice-rack. Although not boasting a comprehensive list of rotating, tuning, decorating, and upgrading, it was nevertheless a unique way of gauging your progress through the game. It also offered a tidy way to proudly exhibit your collection of speedy-sprites to your friends… well, up until you flicked the off switch on your Mega Drive and scurried out of the door to play some footy. But then, there was always the allure of *FIFA* and a multitap.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

BMX SIMULATOR
SYSTEMS: CPC, ZX SPECTRUM, C64, MSX, AMIGA, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1986

ROCK STAR ATE MY HAMSTER
SYSTEMS: CPC, ZX SPECTRUM, C64, AMIGA, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1988

TREASURE ISLAND DIZZY
SYSTEMS: CPC, ZX SPECTRUM, C64, NES, AMIGA, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1987





TOY GLORY

Micro Machines proved so successful on the Mega Drive that Codemasters quickly got to work on releasing two sequels: *Micro Machines 2: Turbo Tournament,* and the updated, *Turbo Tournament '96,* which was released just a year later. Reacting to the feedback that it had garnered after the release of the first game, Codemasters realised straight away that the franchise had proved a popular multiplayer melee with gamers. It capitalised on this fact by designing a special Mega Drive cart specifically for the game's follow up. Known as the J-Cart, this chunky beast housed two additional controller ports, and made it possible for four players to race simultaneously. While playing with four mates had the tendency to make your Mega Drive look like it had been rigged up to a life support machine, it did allow friend-affluent gamers out there the chance to race without having to wait for those annoying turns.



DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

THE HISTORY OF STRATEGIC SIMULATIONS INC READS LIKE A TALE IN DIVINE PROVIDENCE, WITH CHANCE MEETINGS AND RIGHT-PLACE-AT-THE-RIGHT-TIME STORIES CROPPING UP MORE THAN PURE LUCK SHOULD SURELY ALLOW FOR. CRAIG RITCHIE GUIDES US THROUGH THE FIRST IN A TWO-PART SERIES LOOK AT THIS RPG AND WARGAMING POWERHOUSE…

Strategic Simulations Inc

(PART 1 OF 2)

It was summer, 1979. Fresh out of college, 21-year-old Californian Joel Billings was just months away from heading off to business school to study an MBA. Receiving more exposure to computers through his summer job, and already a veteran table-top wargamer, he considered the possibilities of recreating strategic board games on emerging technology. With the home computer market slowly getting to its feet, Joel saw an opportunity to combine his passion for wargames with his basic computer knowledge, and decided to hold off on his MBA to start his own business, Strategic Simulations Inc.

Getting to work on realising his dream of founding a computer wargaming company, Joel put together a flyer calling for programmers interested in making computer wargames. He dropped this off at a local gaming outlet, and it wasn't long before his strategy paid off. John Lyon, a keen wargamer and competent programmer, was the first to phone up, and the two immediately hit it off. With the talent in place, development of SSI's first title got underway, and true to Joel's roots, it was a WWII-themed strategy game.

"My dad was in World War II and was interested in military history," Joel says, "I remember him reading me Bruce Catton books on the Civil War when I was six or seven. I loved maths and the early Avalon Hill games all had the odds charts, where you figured out 2-1, 3-1 and so on. When I was seven



The in-depth non-player character interactions make *Eye Of The Beholder II* well worth a play even today.



Eye Of The Beholder II: The Legend Of Darkmoon was an incredibly good sequel.

SSI INSTANT EXPERT



Joel Billings founded SSI in 1979, at only 21 years old.

The name Strategic Simulations Inc was influenced by wargaming heavyweights Strategic Publications Inc (SPI) and game developer Automated Simulations (later known as Epyx).

SSI published over a hundred and fifty games in its 21-year lifespan.

Gary Grigsby worked for a military industrial complex before developing games for SSI.

Gary's likeness appeared in the artwork for the adverts of two of SSI's fantasy titles, *Questron* and *Gemstone Warrior*.

Before progressing to Assembler, the majority of SSI's games were programmed in BASIC, with phase resolution sometimes taking over an hour to compute.

SSI sold accelerator boards that sped the Apple II up by 350 per cent, allowing dedicated gamers to get through significantly more turns per sitting.

Joel's sister, Susan, ran the office, production and accounting before taking on the role of head of human resources.

Joel's mother, Leona, was responsible for the popular *Rails West!* railroad-management sim, devising the rules and overseeing development of the project.

Joel's father, Robert, was an English professor who wrote his thesis on the American war novel, and contributed to writing backgrounds to the campaign settings on a number of SSI's games.

I started playing *Tactics II* and then *Gettysburg* with my dad. The military history part became more and more important, and I remained interested in historical games – mostly from 1775 to 1975 – and never got into *Dungeons & Dragons* like some of my friends did. I even converted most of the members of my junior high school chess club to a wargame club in eighth grade.

I wanted to make a Bismarck game because it seemed relatively easy to do," he adds. "There were only a few pieces for the AI to move and we would take advantage of the limited intelligence [of the available computers]. I had three or four games on the subject and was a big World War II naval-miniature player in high school. I came up with a design and found a computer for John to work on by getting the head of the homebrew computer club at Amdahl, a mainframe computer maker where I had a summer job, to let John come over to his house to work on the game."

John, handling the technical side, reasoned that the first stage of development would be all about getting a 'fox and hounds'-style game operating where a number of 'hound' pieces would roam the map looking for the 'fox' – a simplified rendition of the British fleet hunting the German battle cruiser Bismarck in the famed battle of May 1941. John was satisfied he could make it happen, and the two started looking for funding for the project.

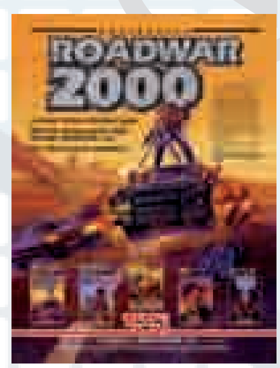
Using knowledge gained from his economics degree, and with several marketing and quantitative analysis classes under his belt, Joel began collecting market data at the local game store as well as from the gaming convention held in the San Francisco area where he was staying. Having worked on the Bismarck idea for about six weeks and with programming of SSI's first game already in progress, Joel spoke with Tom Shaw at Avalon Hill, but it was a meeting that would ultimately prove fruitless. "They were working on their first six games and he must have thought I was a know-nothing kid," says Joel. "I then spoke with one of the two founders of Epyx (known as Automated Simulations at the time) as I saw a tape cassette game of theirs in my local game store. I was interested in sharing market data but he was not interested. I think I was a little naive about business at this point."

Joel admits to being a big Avalon Hill fan and says that if the wargaming giant had been interested, he would have sold SSI's games to it. The lack of interest from Tom Shaw, coupled with the unenthusiastic response from Automated Simulations made Joel realise that SSI would have to publish its own games.

AN UNENTHUSIASTIC RESPONSE TO BISMARCK MEANT SSI WOULD HAVE TO PUBLISH ITS OWN GAMES

Initially developing *Computer Bismarck* only for the TRS-80 (which Joel himself also refers to as the Trash-80), Joel then had a chance encounter that would result in one of the most fortuitous moves that the fledgling company would make. "I met Trip Hawkins through a venture capitalist I was put in touch with by Brook Byers of Kleiner Perkins/EA fame," he recalls. "My uncle that I was staying with knew him from his work in biotech. Trip was working for Apple, two and a half years before he started Electronic Arts, and he convinced me that we should program our game on the Apple II."

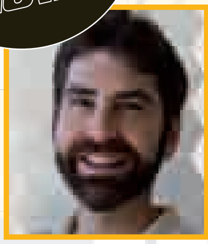
The coding of the fox and hound system had begun on the TRS-80 in early-August 1979, and two months later Joel's uncle bought him an Apple II. "I



RoadWar 2000. Mad Max anyone?

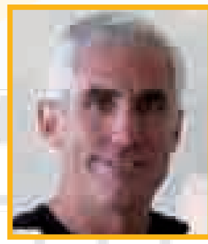
DEVELOPER LOOKBACK

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?



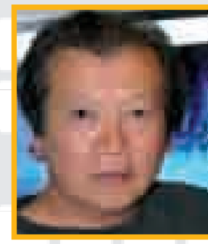
Joel Billings

Now living in the surfer town of Encinitas near San Diego, California, and with nearly three decades of experience under his belt, Joel is still at the helm of a strategy game development house, having started 2by3 Games with long-time compatriots Gary Grigsby and Keith Brors in 2000. Joel has extended his efforts beyond computer games, however, and along with his wife has contributed time to the Children of Chernobyl project, and has helped to create the DOMOI Foundation – a non-profit organisation active with Eastern European adoption groups, which he says was all made possible by SSI.



Gary Grigsby

Gary hasn't stopped designing wargames, some 25 years after he completed work on his very first game. Working together with Joel Billings and Keith Brors at 2by3 Games, his most recent title is Gary Grigsby's *World At War: A World Divided*. Gary is now a keen fantasy football league player, but also admits that designing wargames for so many years has ruined actually playing them. "He's certainly sociable, he just doesn't like the limelight", comments Joel. "He just likes to design games, code them, walk on the beach and hang out with his friends at the beach bars."



Louis Saekow

Currently residing in Seattle, Washington, Louis has the enviable 'job' of designing and building luxurious homes, which he then lives in until selling and moving out when the next one is ready. Although no longer an active player in the computer gaming industry, he still assisted 2by3 Games with the dummy artwork on *World At War: A World Divided*. "I would have done it for free," he says, "but Joel insisted on paying me." Louis says that there is not enough gratitude in this world to express how he feels about Joel and SSI.



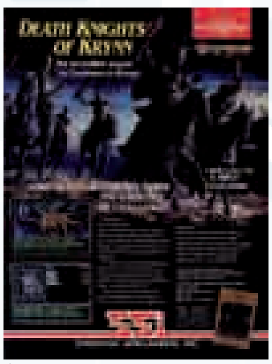
Ⓐ *Buck Rogers: Countdown to Doomsday* offered you a variety of character models to choose from.





Ⓐ Raistlin as he appears in *Heroes of the Lance*. It was one of SSI's more popular stabs at the Dungeons and Dragons franchise.

Ⓑ *Heroes of the Lance* was an adaptation of the famous Dungeons &Dragons novel.



Ⓐ *Death Knight of Krynn*: Another D&D title that like *Heroes of the Lance*, was set in the fantasy world of Krynn.



Ⓐ Advert depicting a selection of SSI's Dungeons & Dragons adaptations.

was still working my summer job which was extended until December", says Joel, "and John was working full time and would come over to my apartment in my uncle's house and program late into the night. Then in November, John became our first full-time programmer and I would come home after work and work with him on the game. The nice thing about development then was that things were small, especially memory on the computer, and we could do things quickly. I knew BASIC from the one computer class I had taken in college and since most of the game was in BASIC, I could read John's code. I helped enter data and do other work while John did the main coding."

After converting their existing code to the Apple, Joel and John soon found a graphics package that enabled them to create *Bismarck*'s map on the newfound hardware. "Everything fell into place and *Bismarck* was finished by the end of January 1980 – a six month dev cycle. I remember Trip being very impressed."

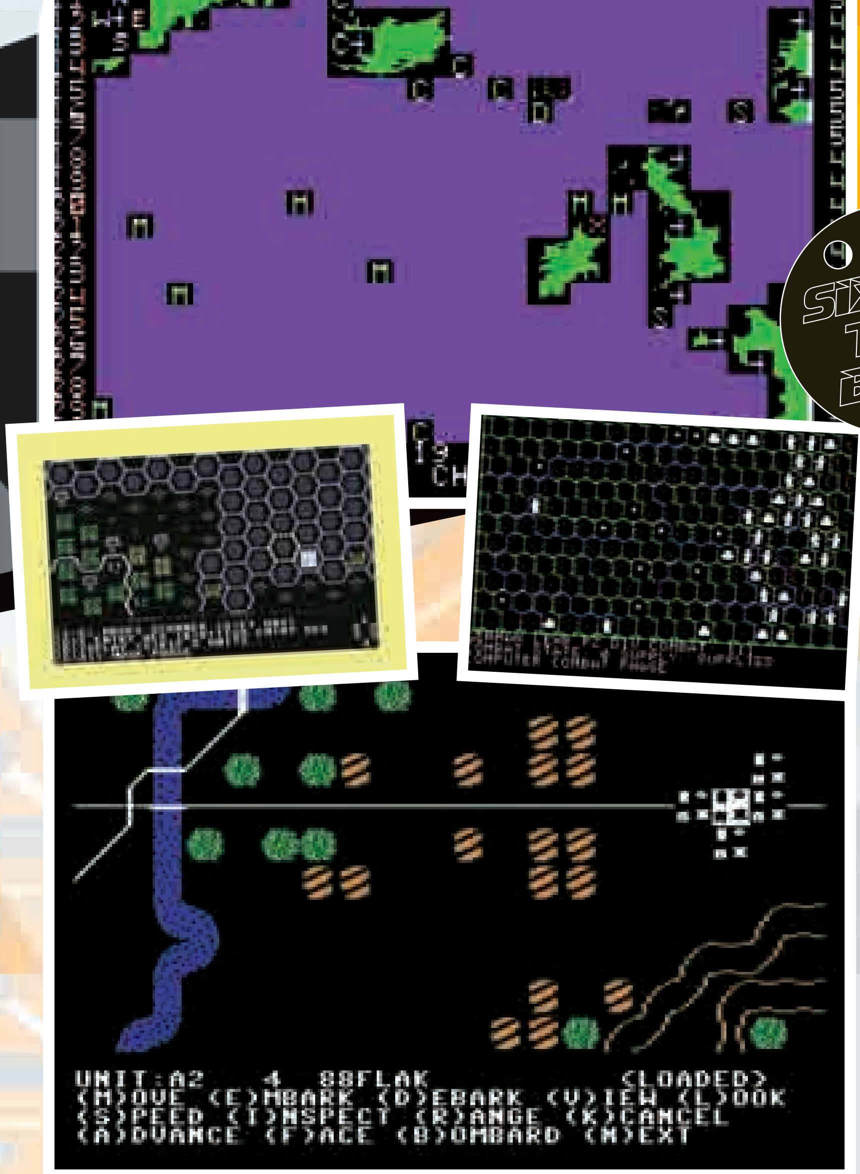
A programmer called Ed Williger had also been sourced through the same game store flyer as John. Working on SSI's second game, he completed *Computer Ambush*, not too long after *Computer Bismarck* was ready, and Joel had to get to work on the next phase of computer game development: packaging and distribution of the finished product.

Taiwanese-born Louis Saekow, having moved with his family to the US in 1969, graduated in 1976 with a degree in bioscience. Louis's love was for comic books, inspired by the work of Neal Adams of Batman and Green Arrow fame. But with the idea of life as a professional graphic artist little more than a pipe dream, becoming a doctor seemed the sensible option. After three years of testing blood and operating the computers in a local hospital, he was just about ready to head off to med school. Then one night, young Louis spoke to an older medical technician about his thoughts on packing in his graphic design aspirations in exchange for a career in medicine. 'I'm too old to chase my dreams,' she told him, 'but you're still young enough to starve for another couple of years as an aspiring artist. You've got no family to support, and no one depending on you at this point in your life. Don't give up on your dreams yet.' Louis held off on making any serious decisions. Just two months later, he got a call from a Joel Billings.

Despite Avalon Hill's lack of interest in his work, Joel had nevertheless taken a leaf out of its book by wanting to invest in the style and design of SSI's maps, manuals and box art. Not content to ship his games in the traditional zip-lock bags so synonymous with the late-Seventies computer scene, he'd decided to pursue a more creative option.

"You can thank Avalon Hill for the inspiration, me for the idea and decision to do it, and Louis Saekow for the execution," says Joel. "From day one, which was as soon as I knew we'd have to publish ourselves, I saw Avalon Hill as the gold standard of wargame marketing and packaging. I wanted our games to look like their games on the shelf, and have the same perceived quality throughout. I just didn't like the idea of selling things in zip-lock bags. And for a good strategy game, especially a wargame, reading the rules was half the fun for me. Thanks to a mutual acquaintance, I met Louis Saekow who was a kid like me, just a couple of years out of Stanford University. He wanted to be a graphic artist so I contracted him to do the work, and the rest is history. In the early days, he worked by himself as hard on the packaging, advertising and marketing materials as I did on the games."

"My girlfriend's roommate's boyfriend was Joel's officemate at Amdahl," laughs Saekow, remembering



Never mind the crude looking visuals, it's the actual gameplay that's all-important.

their friend-of-a-friend-of-a-friend introduction. "Back then Joel didn't know anything about packaging computer games, and I wasn't that experienced either. Still, he was revolutionary: not only did he make computer games, which was crazy enough, but he also wanted to do, well, premium packaging, if you will. I wanted to make it as a graphic designer, but to be honest I think all I had done at that point was the artwork for a bicycle safety comic. I only had two weeks to complete the artwork for Computer Bismarck, and at first Joel did not seem keen on giving me the job, so I told him 'if you don't like it you don't have to pay me'. I probably worked 500 hours in those two weeks."

Eager not to let this opportunity pass him by, Louis got to work immediately. The first challenge, however, was figuring out just how the hell he was going to pull it off. Fortunately, his roommate at the time worked at a magazine company and had access to a stat camera – the now obsolete large-format photographic equipment formerly used in publishing. "We had to sneak in there at midnight," Louis says, remembering his time as a printwork saboteur, "and we used up an entire box of film because we didn't even know how to use the camera. Needless to say, we eventually got it done, and Joel really liked it. Then he looked at me and said 'do you want cash or shares?'. I said 'gimme the shares' even though 500 bucks would have kept me fed for a long time back then. In hindsight, it was easily the best $500 I ever 'spent'."

With the box artwork done, and the printing handled by Louis's cousin, Joel found himself holding SSI's first completed product. But one small oversight on his part reared its head: where was he going to store the other 1,999? "I slept with my bed surrounded by 2,000 *Bismarck* boxes piled to the ceiling," he laughs. "I figured if there was an earthquake they'd find me buried under game boxes."

His graphic design a success, Louis secured himself as a permanent fixture at Strategic Simulations Inc, and would go on to be responsible for the artwork on just about every product ever released by the company.

The company's next 'chance meeting' came in early-1982 when Joel, working tech-support on top of all his other responsibilities, answered a call from a player needing help on submarine sim *Torpedo Fire*. The two got chatting and the caller, a keen wargaming fan named Gary Grigsby, mentioned he had his own computer and was working on a wargame design of his own. His curiosity piqued, Joel suggested

YOU'VE GOT NO FAMILY TO SUPPORT, AND NO ONE DEPENDING ON YOU AT THIS POINT IN YOUR LIFE. DON'T GIVE UP ON YOUR DREAMS

SIX OF THE BEST



Eye Of The Beholder II: The Legend Of Darkmoon

The sequel to one of the greatest RPGs ever, *Legend Of Darkmoon* improved on the original and was received by fans as an instant classic. With Westwood's developers focusing on deeper NPC interaction and carefully crafted environments, the excellent graphics and great story make this still worth a play today.



Panzer General

Possibly the best true computer wargaming title of all time, this landmark game saw excellent sales as it appealed to hardcore fans and newcomers alike. Released in 1994, *Panzer General* boasted a great interface and some of the best graphics ever seen in a traditional wargame, and would go on to spawn a number of successful sequels.



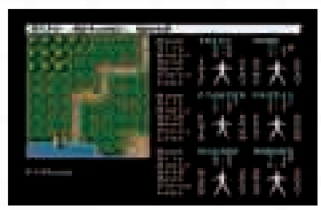
Guadalcanal Campaign

Gary Grigsby's first game was a great success and set the standard for a long line of award-winning wargames to come. Despite a primarily text-based interface and graphics, which have not fared well over time, the historically accurate and finely detailed *Guadalcanal Campaign* is regarded as a wargaming classic.



Tony La Russa's Ultimate Baseball

A slight aside from its usual fair, this sim of 'America's favourite pastime' proved that SSI was more than capable of producing not only wargames and RPGs. Sporting digitised speech, smooth graphics and intricate management options, *Ultimate Baseball* was a hit on both PC and Commodore 64.



Phantasie III: The Wrath Of Nikademus

Offering improved graphics, and a better combat system than its prequels, the final chapter in SSI's excellent *Phantasie* trilogy, saw the player out to thwart the evil Nikademus's plans to take over the world. Well received and popular among fantasy fans, this RPG is worth a look for those who missed out the first time.



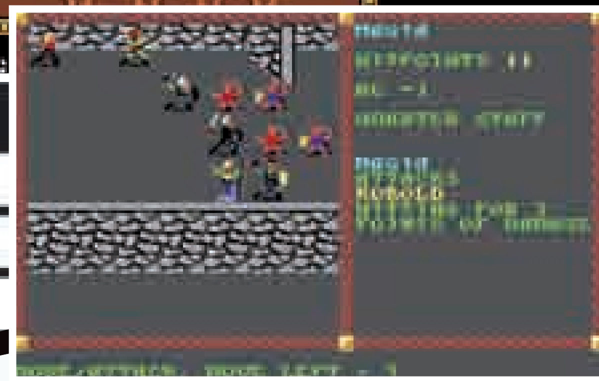
Dark Sun: Shattered Lands

Marking a high point in SSI's second generation of TSR licensed products, this excellent title made great use of the ever popular post-apocalyptic setting so well suited to RPGs. Although suffering from some serious bugs when it was first released, the title still garnered praise from fans and the gaming media.

Developer Lookback

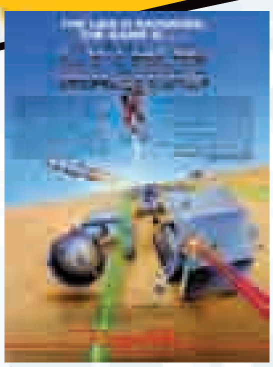




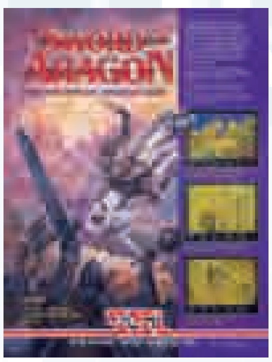


Ⓐ An action scene from Pool of Radiance. Your team of adventurers make short work of a group of evil kobolds.

Ⓐ It may not have had a lucrative licence like the Dungeons & Dragons name to fall back on, but it soon became ovious that *Questron II* didn't need it.



Ⓐ One of gaming's earliest RTSs.



Ⓐ *Sword of Aragon* is considered by many to be the best fantasy war game ever.

that Gary submit his game to SSI for possible publication.

"I started with an SPI type plan," says Joel of his early product development strategy, "by which I mean internally developed games. However, when we started getting games submitted to us within a few months of releasing *Computer Bismarck*, I quickly discovered that it was easier to be like Avalon Hill and publish games from the outside. I never wanted to be accused of blowing somebody off as I know how that feels."

"That was *Guadalcanal Campaign*," adds Gary, "I remember it was probably December of 1981 when I started working on it. It only took me a couple of months to get the game done, and when I was finished it was still strictly a two-player game with no AI whatsoever. It was mid-February 1982 when Joel expressed his interest in developing the product, so I drove over to Mountain View where SSI was located at the time."

Gary met with Joel and Paul Murray, who was then SSI's only full-time programmer, and together they mapped out a plan of what still needed to be done in order to get the game ready for publication. "We worked out some kind of AI," says Gary, "and then the guys in the office started playtesting the game really hard right away. Four months after that, we had something we were happy to release." *Guadalcanal Campaign* went on to excellent sales, commended by hardcore fans for its historical accuracy and meticulous attention to detail – two features that would become associated with Gary's games from then on. "That was my thing at the time," says Gary. "Historical accuracy was the reason I got into designing my own wargames. I was a frustrated wargame player, having played wargames for 12 or 13 years by the time I sent my first game in to SSI. That was my motivation for buying my first computer in 1979 – so that I could handle the book-keeping aspects of wargames, especially when playing on a tabletop with map and counters."

Gary was far from alone in his wargaming frustrations, and *Guadalcanal* sold around three and a half thousand copies – an outstanding figure for such a niche market. His opening title a success, and with a solid contribution to developing the SSI brand, Gary's future as a computer wargame developer was set in stone.

With SSI releasing a plethora of hit games and becoming recognised as a leader in strategic and tactical titles, it decided to take a new direction with a new line of products called RapidFire. "We decided we wanted to market games to customers that might not want to play the more serious and slow SSI wargames," says Joel, "so we decided to package them differently and call them RapidFire to emphasise the speed and ease of play – some of them had real-time or action elements unlike our other games."

RapidFire was a success and, now recognised for unique and novel titles as well as its trademark strategy fare, the company started attracting more and more outside talent, including the likes of the legendary Dani Bunten Berry, young programming mastermind Keith Brors, and a talented developer named Chuck Kroegel who would later go on to become the company's vice president of research and development. It was a great time for Strategic Simulations Inc, a company that could seemingly do no wrong. Growing from strength to strength, Joel hired SSI's first sales person in 1983 and by the end of the

SSI Timeline 1962-1986

1962 THE SAEKOW FAMILY MOVES FROM TAIWAN TO BANGKOK, AND SEVEN-YEAR-OLD LOUIS PICKS UP HIS FIRST COMIC BOOK, CHANGING HIS LIFE FOREVER.

1965 SEVEN-YEAR-OLD JOEL BILLINGS PLAYS HIS FIRST WARGAME, TACTICS II BY AVALON HILL.

1979 RECENTLY GRADUATED FROM COLLEGE, JOEL OPTS OUT OF ATTENDING BUSINESS SCHOOL IN FAVOUR OF STARTING A COMPUTER GAMES COMPANY.

JOEL PUTS FLYERS UP IN LOCAL GAME STORES ASKING FOR PROGRAMMERS. JOHN LYON AND ED WILLIGER RESPOND.

A YOUNG EXECUTIVE FROM APPLE BY THE NAME OF TRIP HAWKINS CONVINCES JOEL TO CONSIDER THE APPLE II AS A GAMING PLATFORM.

GRAPHIC ARTIST LOUIS SAEKOW IS INTRODUCED TO JOEL. LOUIS GOES ON TO DESIGN THE ARTWORK FOR NEARLY EVERY SSI GAME OVER THE NEXT TWO DECADES.

1980 JOHN LYON COMPLETES DEVELOPMENT OF SSI'S FIRST GAME, COMPUTER BISMARCK.

ED WILLIGER PROGRAMS COMPUTER AMBUSH, SSI'S SECOND GAME.

1981 THE COMPANY GROWS TO 15 EMPLOYEES, WITH SALES TOTALLING $900,000 – ALMOST TRIPLE THE FIGURE FROM THE PREVIOUS YEAR.

SSI RELEASES TACTICAL-WAR SIM TORPEDO FIRE. GAMERS WAIT UP TO SEVEN MINUTES FOR THE HARDWARE TO PROCESS A SINGLE TURN.

CLOSE TO THE END OF THE YEAR, JOEL ANSWERS A RANDOM TECH SUPPORT CALL, STARTING A PROFESSIONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH GARY GRIGSBY THAT CONTINUES TO THIS DAY.

1982 GARY GRIGSBY RELEASES THE HISTORICALLY ACCURATE GUADALCANAL CAMPAIGN, MUCH TO THE JOY OF HARDCORE WARGAMERS EVERYWHERE.

SIX TO MISS



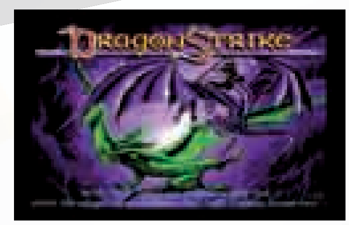
Queen of Hearts

And as for SSI's most poorly received game? "From a sales point of view it was Queen of Hearts," says Joel, "which was a pinball game that we did because John Lyon, programmer of Computer Bismarck, loved pinball. It didn't fit with our product line at all".



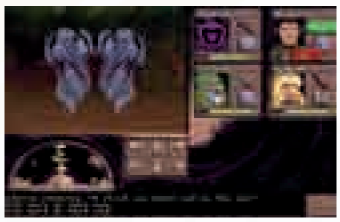
Dragons Of Flame

An uninspired fantasy game based on TSR's Dragonlance campaign setting, *Dragons Of Flame* formed part of SSI's action/RPG hybrid series, that included *Heroes Of The Lance* and *Shadow Sorcerer*. If you're keen for some Dragonlance fun, opt for one of the other two instead.



Dragon Strike

Loved by some, loathed by many others, time has not been kind to this dragon-riding combat simulation. Poor graphics and somewhat repetitive gameplay, have left *Dragon Strike's* novel idea as a bit of a shocker, no matter which platform you try and play it on.



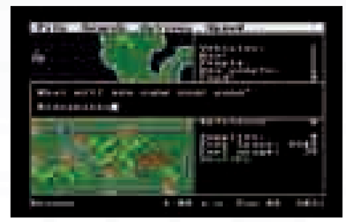
Eye Of The Beholder III: Assault On Myth Dranor

With the company no longer able to draw on the talents of the team that developed *Eye Of The Beholder I* and *II*, the third outing failed miserably. Marred by poor balancing and lacklustre design, the conclusion of the trilogy was regarded by fans as a major disappointment..



Knights Of The Desert

A World War II simulation of Rommel's campaign in North Africa designed by SSI stalwart Chuck Kroegel. Despite being possibly the first game to offer unit stacking, many found *Knights Of The Desert* to be tedious and slow, with the limitations of the early technology working much to the detriment of the game's playability..



Roadwar Europa

Another game that was almost identical to its predecessor. While there were some minor improvements, *Roadwar Europa* did not offer enough new goodies to really stand out over *Roadwar 2000*. It can be fun at times, but this is hardly going to make it into anyone's Favourite Games Of All Time list...

STRATEGIC SIMULATIONS INC RELEASED A PLETHORA OF HIT GAMES AND BECAME RECOGNISED AS A LEADER IN STRATEGIC AND TACTICAL TITLES

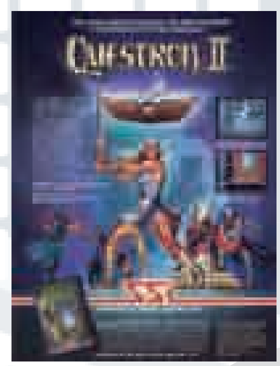
year, it had raked in a total of $1,830,000, almost doubling its 1982 figure.

In 1984, SSI branched out yet again by making its first foray into the increasingly popular computer role-playing market. With the release of *Questron*, developed by newcomers Charles Dougherty and Gerald Wieczorek, SSI had, unknowingly at the time, made a decision that would have a major impact on the company a few years down the line.

Due to the success of *Questron* (despite the fact that some gamers accused it of being a blatant rip-off of Richard Garriott's *Ultima* games) SSI followed up with the release of *Gemstone Warrior* from Canadian-based Paradigm Creators Inc. Both titles saw the player traversing the countryside seeking their fortune, gaining experience and ultimately thwarting the plot of an evil mastermind. But at the time words like 'generic' simply didn't apply – the computer role-playing scene was just too small, and fans were snatching up whatever titles they could get their hands on. Another ambitious title was *50 Mission Crush*, which while having a traditional wargame look and feel, added RPG elements, by awarding individual units, experience points, which increased their capabilities.

1985 saw Strategic Simulations Inc launch its most successful role-playing game yet: *Phantasie*. When the first part of this excellent trilogy hit the shelves, gamers snatched it up, eager to experience more of the party-based adventuring that they had come to love in Origin's CRPG market leader *Ultima*. With a number of innovative features and original twists to the genre, SSI had yet another success on its hands, and was quick to ensure that designer Winston Douglas Wood got to work on the remaining chapters in the trilogy, released over the next two years.

SSI's biggest new boost would come in 1987, however, when the company was awarded the coveted licence to design and develop all *Dungeons & Dragons* computer games. A wondrous turn of events indeed, but, alas, we are getting ahead of ourselves, dear reader, and you will have to pick up the next issue of **Retro Gamer** to see just what became of SSI's involvement with the hottest intellectual property in the role-playing universe.



Questron's excellent reception was followed up by a number of similar games.

JOEL SHARES HIS PLAYER'S NOTES FOR NAPOLEON'S CAMPAIGNS WITH COMPUTER GAMING WORLD MAGAZINE – ONE OF THE FIRST DEVELOPER DIARIES EVER?

SSI LAUNCHES ITS RAPIDFIRE RANGE. RETRO GAMING LEGEND DANI BUNTEN BERRY DEVELOPS THE POPULAR CYTRON MASTERS, CONSIDERED TO BE THE FIRST EVER REAL-TIME STRATEGY GAME.

THE COMMODORE 64 IS RELEASED. SSI CODERS FIND THEMSELVES HAVING TO PROGRAM THEIR GAMES FOR YET ANOTHER SYSTEM.

1983 SSI TAKES ON ITS FIRST SALES MANAGER, AND TOTALS $1.8 MILLION BY YEAR END.

JOEL HIRES VIDEOGAME DEVELOPER CHUCK KROEGEL WHO WOULD LATER GO ON TO BE VICE PRESIDENT OF RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT.

1984 QUESTRON, SSI'S FIRST RPG, IS RELEASED ON COMMODORE 64 AND APPLE II. ULTIMA COPYCAT ACCUSATIONS FLY.

SSI DEVELOPS TURN-BASED STRATEGY TITLE, 50 MISSION CRUSH. WITH SOME MISSIONS ABLE TO BE COMPLETED IN JUST TEN MINUTES, IT IS A CONSIDERABLE DEPARTURE FROM ITS LENGTHY WARGAMES UP TO THIS POINT.

KEITH BRORS DEVELOPS A SYSTEM TO RAPIDLY PORT GAMES FROM ATARI 800 TO COMMODORE 64, MUCH TO THE DELIGHT OF GARY AND THE OTHER SSI CODERS.

1985 WIZARD'S CROWN IS DEVELOPED BY KEITH BRORS AND PAUL MURRAY. THE GAME ENGINE WOULD LATER BE ADAPTED AND EXPANDED FOR THE 'GOLD BOX' DUNGEONS & DRAGONS GAMES. ACCUSATIONS FLY.

SSI RELEASES PHANTASIE, THE FIRST PART OF A POPULAR FANTASY ROLE-PLAYING GAME TRILOGY FROM WINSTON DOUGLAS WOOD.

1986 ROADWAR 2000 IS RELEASED, ONE OF THE FIRST POST-APOCALYPTIC TITLES TO HIT HOME COMPUTERS IN 1986. THE COMPANY EXPANDS TO A TOTAL OF 32 EMPLOYEES AND IS RAKING IN SALES OF JUST UNDER $4 MILLION.

STARBIKE

JETBIKES IN SPACE? WHATEVER NEXT?



- » **PUBLISHER:** THE EDGE SOFTWARE
- » **RELEASED:** 1984
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** ZX SPECTRUM
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1



HISTORY

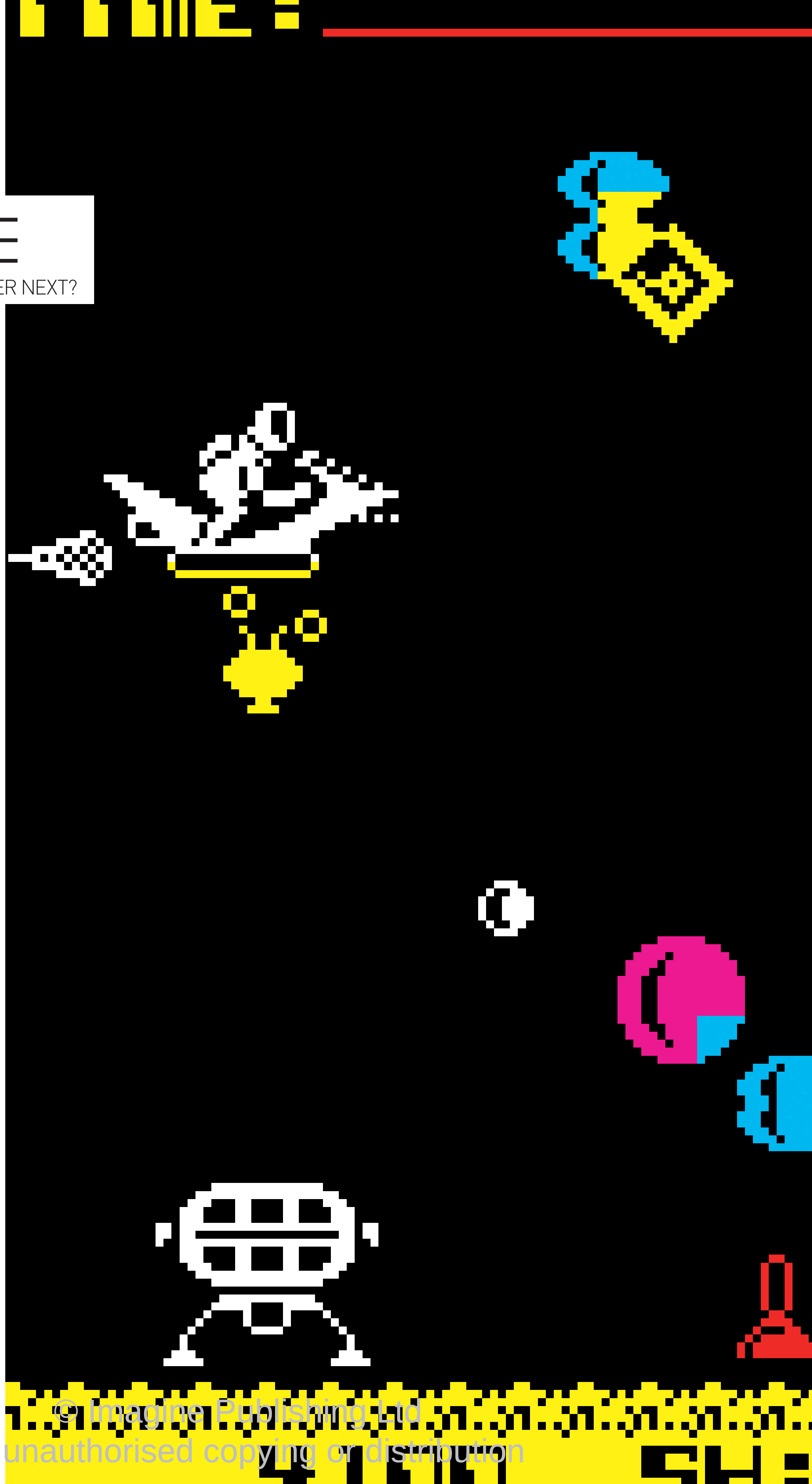
While the Spectrum is home to many classic titles that cover a wide range of genres, *Starbike* often goes completely unnoticed by many, which is a shame as it really is a cracking little blaster.

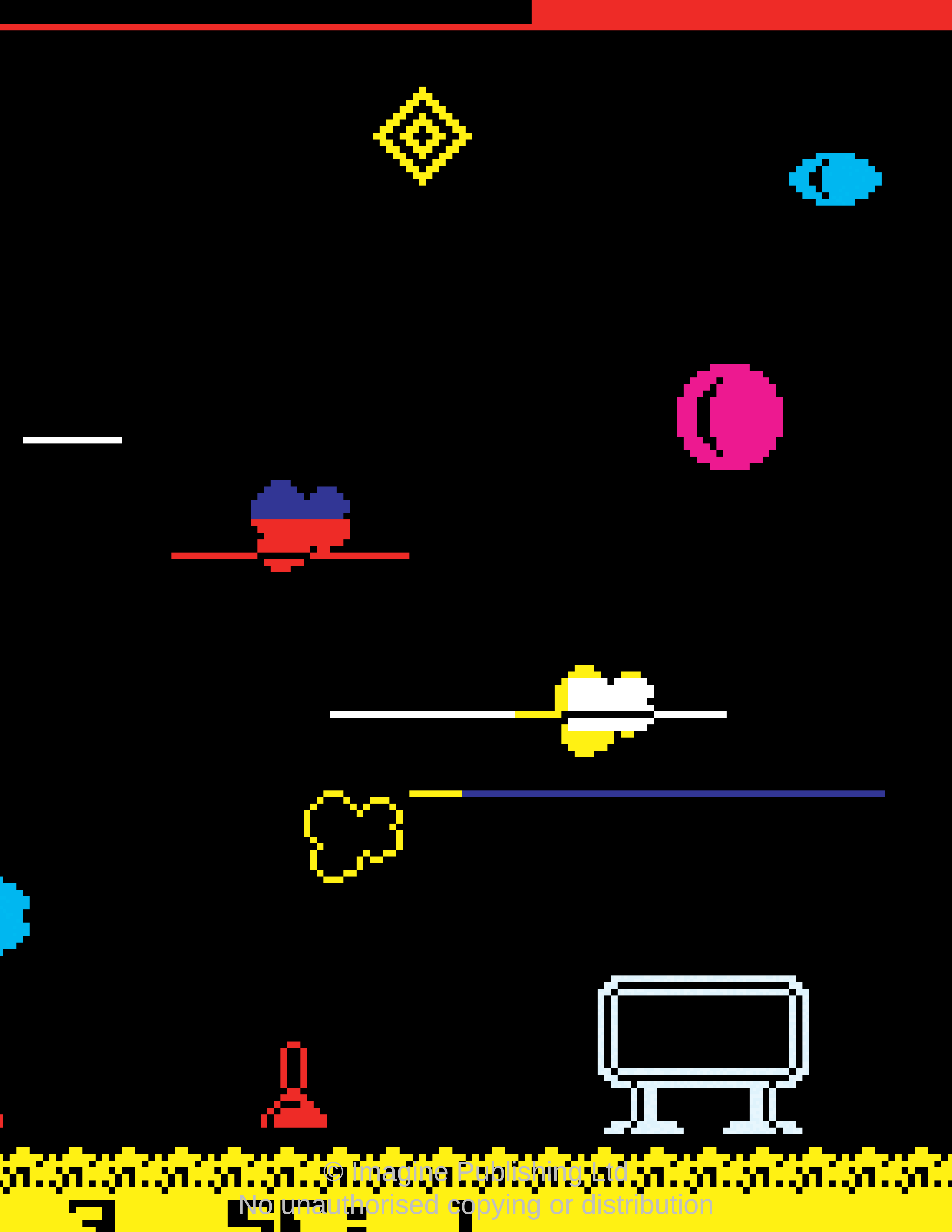
It's never going to feature in any Spectrum owner's top ten (even a top 100 would probably be pushing it), and original review scores didn't exactly go wild over this clone of *Lunar Jetman* and *Defender* when it was first released for the then-princely sum of £6.95. However, there's still something about *Starbike* that constantly makes me return to it. Maybe it's the fantastically bright colours, or the simple, yet oh-so-tight gameplay, or perhaps it's just because it takes me back to a Saturday afternoon when I would play it around a mate's house; but for me, *Starbike* always manages to deliver.

Taking control of the Starbike, you do nothing more than speed across the scrolling landscape looking for Orolas (basically, cute yellow aliens), that can be picked up *Defender*-style and carried home to your waiting spaceship. Although the alien landscape is relatively sparse to begin with, it's soon filled with all manner of foreign objects and flying debris; and later stages require extremely quick reactions if you're planning to track down the missing beasties and get back to your craft in one piece.

Luckily, your flying bike is fitted with a constantly firing laser, so you can zip through the majority of the early stages by simply moving left and right. There's even a teleporter available, which is not only great for covering large distances in a short space of time, but also enables you to escape potentially deadly collisions (your shield will only enable you to survive five encounters).

Yes, it's far from original, especially when the likes of MAME allow you to actually play the original games that these clones were based on; but if you're looking for a vibrant, fun blaster, *Starbike* most definitely delivers. Before you head off to eBay in search of a copy though, seek out the brilliant compilation *SoftAid*, which featured *Starbike* and nine other games.





THE MAKING OF…



TETRIS

Responsible for unleashing a game that's persevered for two decades and infiltrated almost every type of hardware imaginable, Alexey Pajitnov talks to Craig Grannell about how the ground-breaking Tetris was, for him, initially a small, insignificant game inspired by an obscure mathematical puzzle

'Do androids dream of electric sheep?' was a question posed by Philip K Dick in his 1968 novel of the same name. If so, they're the lucky ones because I dream of blocks comprising four squares, falling downwards, rotating and slotting together to create solid lines, which subsequently vanish, along with a small amount of my sanity each time. This kind of dream, referred to as the '*Tetris* effect' is perhaps more common than you would think (which doesn't mean you're any less crazy if you experience it – just that there are more crazy people out there than you thought), and it highlights the massive reach of the action-puzzler that prompts it. Because, for all of videogaming's attempts to become increasingly mainstream, there are few games that achieve the lofty goal

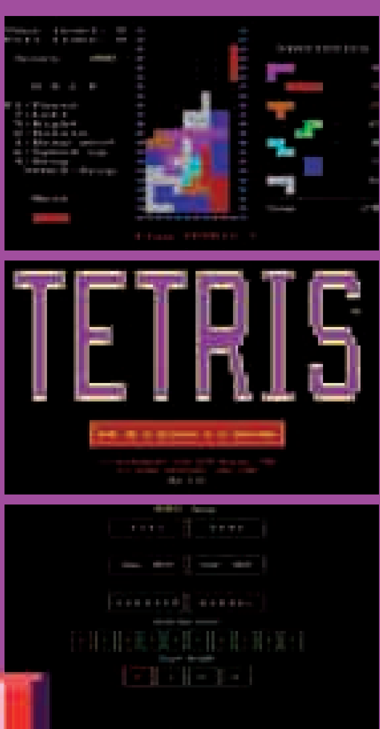
> "TETRIS AND GAME BOY WERE BORN FOR EACH OTHER – THEY FIT TOGETHER SO WELL. I CAN'T IMAGINE TWO OTHER PRODUCTS CREATED ABSOLUTELY INDEPENDENTLY THAT FIT EACH OTHER SO WELL"





» Above and right: The NES version. Feeling annoyed because you think you're not getting enough 'I' pieces? NES *Tetris* keeps count – handy for paranoid gamers.

of being truly recognisable to all – even stalwart classics such as *Space Invaders* and *Pac-Man* may be unknown to younger audiences. However, *Tetris* is different – almost ubiquitous. For all its appeal and reach, it started off as little more than an amusing distraction for its creator, Alexey Pajitnov, while he tested new hardware while working at the Dorodnicyn Computing Centre of the Academy of Science of the USSR, in Moscow.



» The DOS port helpfully tells you to 'Play *TETRIS*!', in case you thought it was some kind of blocky rolling demo.

MOTHER RUSSIA

As a graduate of computer science, Alexey's work at the Academy of Science was largely based around artificial intelligence research, and he describes himself at the time as "a young workaholic – the type that loves to program and sit for long hours at work". Alexey was also tasked with figuring out how new hardware that regularly arrived at the academy could be put to use for his research. "The best way to learn a new machine is to try and make a small program for it to see how it works," he explains, leading up to the reason why *Tetris* was initially created. "Small computer games were the ideal form for this kind of testing program, and that's why I had some kind of excuse, if you will, to work on my game."

Of course, hardware is somewhat by the by – the crux of any game (or, at least, any good game) is its concept, and although *Tetris* would become a fluid, organic project during development, its seeds were sewn early on in Alexey's life. "I was a sharp kid, and have always been interested in riddles and puzzles, and I even changed schools to join one with a special mathematical component," he explains. "That was also the time of communism in Russia, and so we didn't have too much entertainment around us – and so intellectual mind games were a very good diversion. I saw this passion all around me, and children used to compete in a kind of 'mathematical Olympics' competition, in which I participated a lot. This part of my life later translated into the games that I did."

Of the puzzles that fascinated Alexey, pentominoes stood out. "It's a dozen pieces made out of five squares, and they kind of look like jigsaw pieces, only more mathematical," he explains. "The puzzle existed in Russia, sold in stores and fashioned in plastic, and I thought it was absolutely great – the best puzzle in the world." What appealed most was the simplicity of the pieces and the massive scope they offered for multiple combinations: "There's no technology in pentominoes – you just take the pieces from the box, play with them and enjoy them. But when you want to put them back in the box, you can spend a couple of hours doing so – at least if you're stubborn enough to try!"

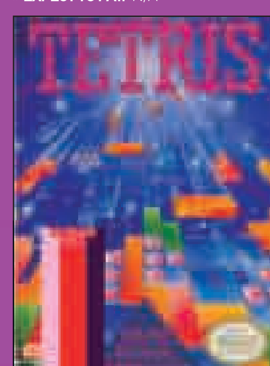
Alexey decided a two-player version of pentominoes might make an interesting game to use for testing the Electronika 60 desktop computer that had recently arrived at the Academy of Science. "I thought that you could somehow divide the pieces – six to each player – and start to put them back into the 'box', and whoever was unable to make the next move would lose," he says.

Without any specification of a final set of rules, Alexey set to work on programming his new game: "First, I needed to create an environment, some

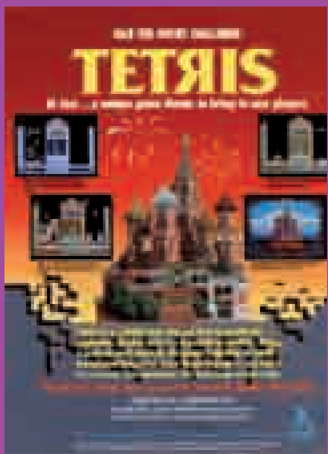
IN THE KNOW



» PUBLISHER: N/A
» DEVELOPER: ALEXEY PAJITNOV
» RELEASED: 1985
» GENRE: ACTION-PUZZLER
» FORMATS: ELECTRONIKA 60; CONVERTED TO: DOS, GAME BOY AND JUST ABOUT EVERY OTHER PLATFORM IN EXISTENCE.
» EXPECT TO PAY: N/A



THE MAKING OF...
TETRIS



» An arcade flyer for Atari's version of *Tetris*, which featured a surprisingly good two-player mode.



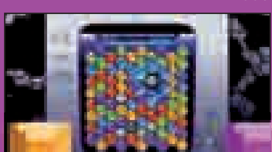
» Alexey Pajitnov's original Electronika 60, with slightly less grunt than a tiny piglet.

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

WELLTRIS
SYSTEMS: DOS (CONVERTED TO AMIGA, AMSTRAD CPC, ARCADE, ATARI ST, C64, MAC OS, ZX SPECTRUM)
YEAR: 1989–91

PANDORA'S BOX
SYSTEM: WINDOWS
YEAR: 1999

HEXIC HD (pictured)
SYSTEM: XBOX 360
YEAR: 2005



kind of graphical procedure to visualise the play field and the pieces. However, at the time this was tricky because my display didn't have any graphics at all – all I had were 24 lines of 80 alphanumeric symbols." In order to design the squares that made up the various pentominoes, open and close square-bracket symbols were used – two together forming a basic square. A ten-by-six play field was created, along with the mechanism to position, rotate and flip each of the pieces before moving them to the field. "But when I wrote the procedure for rotating the pieces, it worked very fast and looked funny – if you frequently pushed a key, the puzzle piece rapidly rotated on the screen," remembers Alexey. "This was so amazing for me. That sounds really ridiculous now [he laughs], but that was the first time I had ever seen such stuff on the screen."

THE BIRTH OF TETRIS

Upon seeing the spinning pieces, Alexey hit upon the idea of making them rotate and move in real time upon being placed on to the screen. "This was a very important moment for *Tetris*", says Alexey. "It went from being a two-player version of a strange game based on an obscure mathematical puzzle to the idea of a real-time game that used the same pieces." First, gravity was used as a natural way for the pieces to fall down. It then became apparent that the original field of play was too restrictive, and so it was enlarged and aligned vertically. "Everything worked, but when I started playing the game, I realised it was really complicated," remembers Alexey. "Pentominoes are fine when you have unlimited time to sit and think about how to use them, but they were too complex for my real-time game where you need to immediately recognise a piece and know what to do with it."

The pieces were honed down to forms made up of four squares – tetrominoes. The complication of piece-flipping was also dispensed with, Alexey instead adding the symmetrical forms of non-symmetrical pieces to the available set. "Suddenly, the interface was much simpler", he says. "You only needed to move and rotate pieces. Because the set was now simpler, I decided you didn't need for the entire set to fall down – pieces could appear in a random order."

Tetris started to resemble the game that we all know and love, but one major component was still missing. "At this point, the game ended really quickly, even if you didn't make mistakes, because the play field was so small, and so I started thinking of ways to prolong my pleasure," laughs Alexey. "My original idea was to create a long, narrow well that could scroll. But after thinking about this, I didn't like the idea – it was difficult to get scrolling working on my machine, and the player would also have to remember what was already on the board. I didn't think my simple mind game should be that complicated." The solution was far simpler: Alexey realised that when a horizontal line was completed, it became obsolete, just taking up space. "I thought,



» To make the game tougher, *Tetris DX*'s programmers added a vomit-inducing colour scheme and vile, animated backgrounds.



» The game that sold 30 million Game Boys. Even today, the Game Boy version of *Tetris* makes us emit happy sounds.

"THE SCREEN WAS REALLY UGLY, AND THE INTERFACE WAS VERY PRIMITIVE – THERE WAS NO REAL DECORATION ON THE SCREEN – BUT IT WORKED. IT WAS SO ADDICTIVE THAT I COULDN'T STOP PLAYING TO FINISH THE DAMN THING!"



» Lurking within *Tetris Worlds* on the PlayStation 2 is a version of the original *Tetris*. Feel that ASCII goodness!

'Why keep it on the screen?', when I need more space to prolong my pleasure," says Alexey. "Instead, I could take it away and give a score for it. And that was the last important moment for *Tetris* – once I did this, the game was kind of ready."

The *Tetris* on Alexey's machine at this point was, by his admission, something of a prototype. However, all of the game's important mechanics were there, and the game had been surprisingly easy to create. "I give you such details about the game, but all the decisions were done in one day, in a couple of hours," claims Alexey. "In reality, somehow, all these decisions were made so naturally." Most importantly, the game was fun – so much so that it took another couple of weeks for Alexey to get the game into a state he was happy with: "The screen was really ugly, and the interface was very primitive – no real decoration on the screen – but it worked. It was so addictive that I couldn't stop playing, in order to finish the damn thing!"

SHARE AND ENJOY

With the game debugged, complete with a level system, scoring and a high-score table, Alexey decided to spread it around Moscow. "It was like a wood fire", he exclaims. "Immediately, every place where they had the Electronika 60, my *Tetris* game was working there, and I realised that maybe the game was not bad and should be ported to the PC, because that was the only way to show it to the world outside of Russia."

The only snag was Alexey's lack of familiarity with the PC – at that point, the first PC had only recently arrived in the computer centre, but it wasn't in Alexey's possession, and he didn't know how to program it. "I was interested in lots of other stuff, and so it might never have happened if it wasn't for Vadim Gerasimov," states Alexey. "He was a schoolboy at the time, but an absolutely genius programmer who fell in love with the PC and knew every bit of the operating system – many big guys in the computer centre went to him for consultation, and someone recommended I work with him on my game." And so, Alexey gave Vadim his code in Pascal, and he began the process of transferring the 2000 lines of code from one machine to the other. "There was nothing in common with the machines – no format, no disks, nothing – but once the code was across, the rest was a piece of cake."

Unlike Alexey's original, colour was possible in the DOS conversion, giving players an additional way to recognise each tetromino. Other features were added over the following months, including the ability to show the next piece, an option to make the square tetromino an invisible 'phantom', and settings that dictated the starting level and height of 'garbage' at the bottom. One similarity to the original was how the game was spread. "The release process was simple – we just gave the game to a couple of our friends," jokes Alexey. "Within a couple of weeks, I saw it everywhere – on every PC in Moscow – and within a couple of months, we got a PC from Eastern Europe that was entirely empty, apart from MS-DOS and *Tetris*."



» *Tetris Zone* for modern PCs requires a 'mere' 8,000 times the RAM of Alexey's Electronika 60 version.



» Turn back now, C64 users! SIT's lovely (but unrelated) title screen masks the jerky, nasty game beyond.

EASTERN BLOCKS

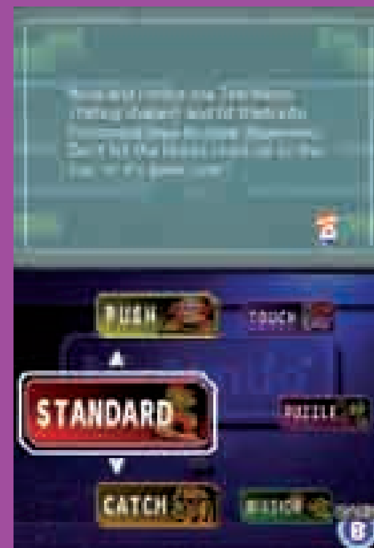
Few games have provoked such legal wrangling as *Tetris*. Once the DOS version spread, Andromeda Software's Robert Stein tried to secure the rights, selling home computer rights to Spectrum Holobyte prior to any deal, and continuing to sub-license rights he didn't own, even after the Soviet government began to market *Tetris* rights via Elektronorgtechnica (ELORG). Eventually, Stein's hand was forced, ELORG enabling handheld rights to remain with Andromeda, but banning *Tetris* rights on any other mediums. By the late-Eighties, several companies claimed *Tetris* rights ownership over home computers and consoles; and so ELORG signed the arcade rights to Atari and console and handheld rights to Nintendo. A major spat occurred when Tengen, Atari's console division, tried to release a NES version of its arcade title, something that had Nintendo fuming. Eventually, Tengen's creation was withdrawn, and while Nintendo's NES release was seen as ordinary, its Game Boy version was one of the most successful games ever. In 1996, Pajitnov and Henk Rogers formed The Tetris Company, gaining rights and finally providing Alexey with royalties for the game he created over a decade earlier. For more details: www.atarihq.com/tsr/special/tetrishist.html.

QUEASY SPIN

Tetris Worlds was heavily criticised for including an 'easy spin' feature (despite it actually originating in *The Next Tetris*), which enables rotated tetrominoes to be floated indefinitely, rather than locking upon landing on another piece. By utilising this method, gamers can make games of *Tetris* last for several hours, therefore many critics claim that this single feature 'breaks' the game. The feature has since been integrated into the official guidelines and is defended by Henk Rogers of The Tetris Company, who claims that it helps newcomers recover from small mistakes, but *Tetris*'s creator is not so sure of its value. "I still don't like it very much", says Alexey. "Unfortunately, on different platforms it was a new style of playing and later on we didn't want to lose the customers, and therefore we tried to support all of those modes. Ideally though, I would have preferred for the game to be as simple as possible."



» The extreme difficulty curve of Atari's arcade *Tetris* is made up for by the stunning dancing prowess of the little Russian chap.



» *Tetris DS* offers six variations on *Tetris*. (But do any of them omit 'easy spin'? No, they do not. Grrr.)



» We're not sure what that packaging says, but we're pretty sure that it's not 'The Biggest *Tetris* Ever!'

From there, *Tetris* exploded on to the world scene. Each version was followed by a lawsuit, as various companies battled to secure rights to the game, while Alexey looked on, not receiving any remuneration, due to ownership residing with the Academy of Science. Alexey is reluctant to talk about what he refers to as *Tetris*'s 'business period', but he's happy to elaborate on what he thinks made the game so popular in the first place, to make the gaming giants scrap over it. "It appeared in the right place, at the right time", he says. "At the time, we didn't have many games on the PC, especially fresh games and puzzle games. Most of what I saw at the time were arcade games, and they looked a little childish." Alexey's keen to note that he loves most types of games and played the likes of *Pac-Man* a lot – the problem was with professionals that had no direct interest in games: "Many people didn't feel good with that type of childish design, but *Tetris* was abstract and without any age connotation, and so everyone felt fine to play it."

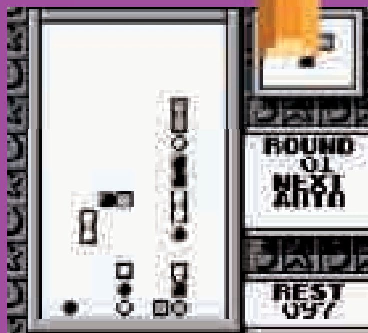
BLOCK PARTY

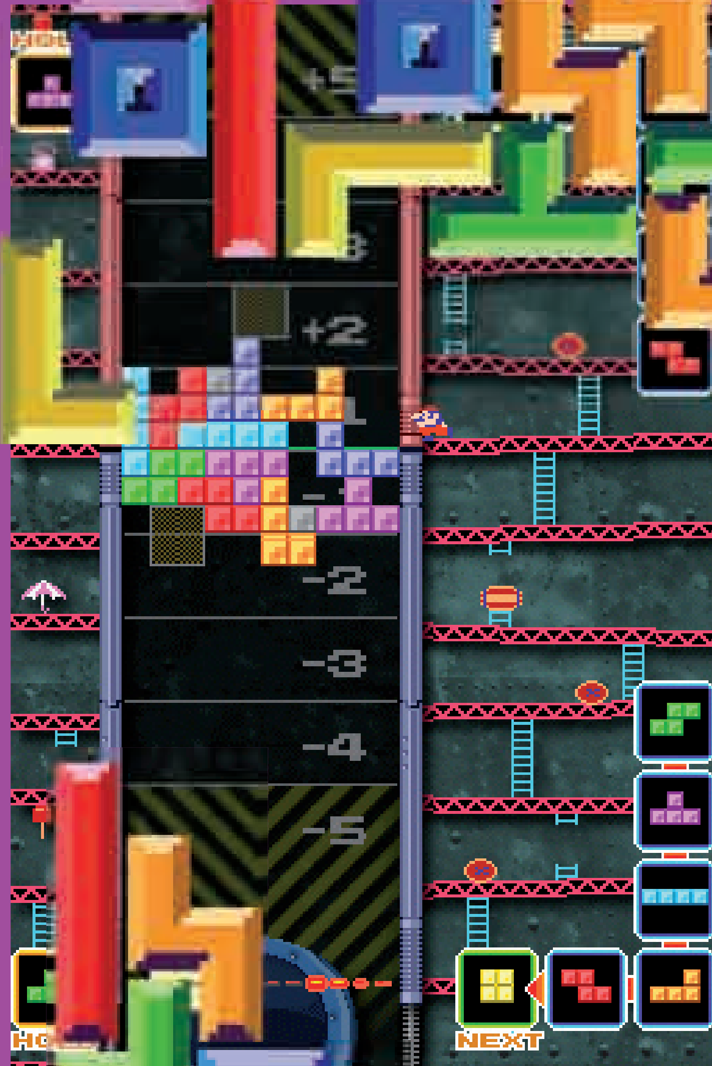
The other thing Alexey believes helped *Tetris* become so popular was that it enabled everyone to join the party: "In the Eighties, computers were a relatively new phenomenon, and some people were almost afraid of them. You never knew what would happen when you pressed a button, and lots of programs were very buggy, which didn't help matters. *Tetris* was very simple and accessible, and it helped people get more familiar and comfortable with computers." Alexey then, appears to consider *Tetris* as a product of its age, rather than a timeless classic: "I'm pretty sure that had I released *Tetris* ten or twelve years later, it would have been seen as just some ordinary game – nothing really so exceptional – but it appeared on the PC at the right kind of social moment."

At this point, I'm not sure I agree. I mention the reception *Tetris* got on the C64 and the Spectrum. Even though both platforms already had a wealth of available titles, and despite the 8-bit conversions of Alexey's game not being particularly good, *Tetris* still stood out from the crowd, receiving near-unanimous acclaim. "I guess that might be true as well", muses Alexey, "but then many people have put forward theories for the popularity of *Tetris*, and no one has a definitive answer – not even me." He does, however, note that the

"IN THE EIGHTIES, COMPUTERS WERE A RELATIVELY NEW PHENOMENON, AND SOME PEOPLE WERE ALMOST AFRAID OF THEM. TETRIS WAS VERY SIMPLE AND ACCESSIBLE, AND IT HELPED PEOPLE GET MORE FAMILIAR AND COMFORTABLE WITH COMPUTERS"

» When *Tetris* goes wrong! *Tetris 2* on Game Boy lacks Pajitnov's involvement, and its complexity is detrimental to the overall experience.





» The rest of the world finally catches up with one of Alexey's original ideas for *Tetris*, with the DS version including scrolling.

Game Boy might just have had something to do with the endurance of his creation. "The Game Boy release was the most lucky moment for *Tetris* – it's what made the game a real phenomenon," he explains. "Somehow, *Tetris* and the Game Boy were born for each other – they fit together so well, in terms of form and design. If I think about it, I can't imagine two other products created absolutely independently that fit each other so well." And the result of the pairing is well known; the combination of Nintendo's hardware and Russian gaming going on to sell over 30 million bundles.

END GAME

As the interview draws to a close, I ask Alexey if he had any idea what kind of a monster he was creating while working back in his lab in Eighties Moscow. "No, of course not", he laughs. "I started with the intention of creating a kind of two-player game for pentominoes. I was always writing very small, insignificant games for different processors and computers, and *Tetris* was just one of them." To hear him talk of the game in this way is strange, but it's easy to imagine how creating a '*Tetris*' is a blessing and a curse for a designer. "I became famous for *Tetris*, and decided to study to become a professional games designer. I had lots of small puzzle ideas and was excited to realise them, and so I started five or six games in a row, one after another," explains Alexey. "I was very productive – very active – I loved creating this stuff, but somehow, every time I proposed a game, everyone looked at me and expected me to deliver another *Tetris*."

After a tough couple of years, during which time Alexey regularly dismissed concepts, due to them being weaker than *Tetris*, he realised he needed to start afresh. "I decided *Tetris* was a story I had to forget about, and that I had to move ahead and start as a young, unknown designer. If you want something in this life, you sometimes have to forget your achievements and start from scratch. I started to work on naïve concepts, and decided that I needed to love it in order to do it, and that was enough – no kind of predictions or expectations of success, and no comparisons. And it started working, because although I did a lot of bad games, I created several good ones, and I'm pretty happy with my career."

We talk about other games and projects, and Alexey lets slip that it's puzzle collection *Pandora's Box* that's closest to his heart: "All this *Tetris* story is great, but a big part of the story is luck – I was lucky to create something like that at the beginning of my career. But with *Pandora's Box*, I created the concept, the genre, and put in so much effort from beginning to end." Clearly, though, *Tetris* will always be with Alexey, the two inextricably linked, the creator watching from the sidelines as his creation rampages onwards to dominate new territory. With that in mind, one final question; is Alexey still happy with his original blueprint, that's become a template for an entire genre? "When working on the original game, I had lots of ideas, such as putting garbage on the screen, but I thought it wouldn't be good for beginners," he says. "I also thought about a more complex scoring system, with premiums for clearing multiple lines, but I wanted to make the scoring as understandable as possible." Alexey pauses for a moment to consider what he would do to the original *Tetris*, given the chance, and then he finally answers: "I don't think I would change a thing."

THANKS TO Rik Morgan (www.handheldmuseum.com) for the handheld *Tetris* image. Special thanks to Blue Planet Software and crew (www.blueplanetsoftware.com) for the images of the Electronika 60 version of *Tetris*.

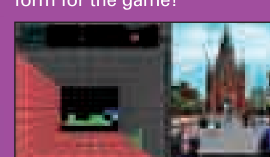


» *Tetris Worlds* with 'easy spin' was not one of the most popular versions of *Tetris*, especially among purists and the game's creator himself, Alexey Pajitnov.

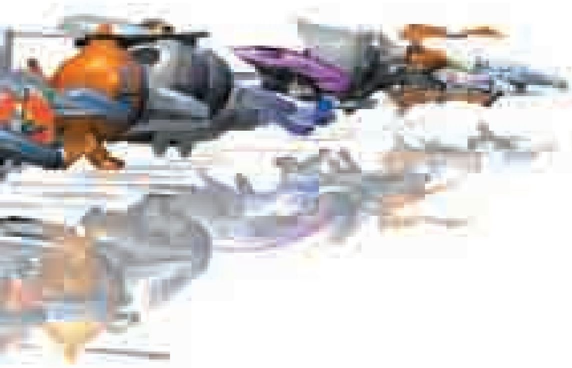
WELL, WELL, WELL. TRIS.

The only Pajitnov-created sequel to *Tetris*, *Welltris* moved the game into 3D. "Everyone wanted a 3D *Tetris*, but I realised that *Tetris* is hard enough for the brain in 2D," says Alexey. "In true 3D, it would be a very boring, slow game, so I decided to create a 3D graphical effect, but keep the gameplay on 2D planes." This grew into the idea of the well, in which the bottom and walls acted in a way similar to the original *Tetris*.

"It was a good game, but unfortunately, it wasn't realised well," says Alexey. "It was perhaps too complicated and the PC version was very attached to EGA, and died with it." Alexey notes that the game managed to survive a little longer as an arcade machine: "In Japan, they created a version for four players, with each one controlling one of the walls around the well – the ideal form for the game!"







THE COMPLETE GUIDE… SHOOT-'EM-UPS

'The Needle' and 'The Wedge': two small spaceships caught forever in a hypnotic duel against each other. Spacewar may not look exceptional, but those two indistinct graphics spawned an industry and kick-started one of the most complex and convoluted genres in videogames. Darran Jones has the dubious pleasure of defining the shoot-'em-up. So join him as he journeys into the history of one of gaming's greatest and most under appreciated genres

Requiring intense concentration and genuine skill to complete, the shoot-'em-up can test your reflexes to the limit. Unsurprisingly it is also one of the most complicated gaming genres, spawning a colossal number of sub-genres and giving us one of the worst headaches since the shmup genre began. So, to make things less confusing, we will focus primarily on the evolution of the arcade shooter over the last three decades – after all it's in the arcades that the genre's most important transformations took place.

Not a shooter in the most traditional sense, *Spacewar* has had an undeniably strong impact on the genre over the past three decades. Seen by many as the first 'competitive shooter' – just one of many shoot-'em-up sub-genres – its simple premise has been mimicked and expanded upon by a variety of titles ranging from 1990 DOS title *Star Control* and SNK's 1996 game *Twinkle Star Sprites* to G-Rev's recently released *Senko no Ronde*. For many purists, however, we have to go back to Taito's *Space Invaders* for the real story of the beginning of the shoot-'em-up genre.

It's long been debated, but the genre's standard definition – to shoot things up – can now apply to everything from run-and-guns like *Contra* and *Metal Slug* to third and first-person shooters like *Gears Of War* and *Half-Life 2*. Clearly the term itself means different things to different gamers, but surely there's one definitive classification? "I'm not touching that with a ten-foot pole," laughs James Greenhalgh, one of the main moderators for Shmups.com, the ultimate website for 2D shooter fans. "You can never make people happy. Every time the debate has been raised, someone comes up with a 20-point bullet list, and someone else – usually me – shoots it down in flames with an example that breaks that list. Normally, the more games the player is familiar with, the better the answer. For example, I consider *Space Invaders*, *Tempest* and *Asteroids* to be shoot-'em-ups, but many don't." Indeed, visit Shmups.com and most will pass these games off either as a 'fixed shooter', 'tube shooter', 'multi-directional shooter' or 'arena shooter'. They wouldn't dream of calling them 'true shoot-'em-ups', even though they were all fired from the same cannon.

Created by Tomohiro Nishikado and released in 1978, *Space Invaders* was a world apart from its competitors, thanks mainly to the invaders themselves. Unlike many games of the time, the antagonists in *Space Invaders* actually fire back at you, their constant journey toward the bottom of the screen becoming a desperate battle for survival as you count every shot you fire. Nishikado's game became a global phenomenon and soon every developer had jumped on the bandwagon and created their own identikit clones or done their level best to take the genre in new and fascinating directions. As a result an astonishing number of games began to surface, many of which would change the genre immeasurably, and within a year Taito's *Space Invaders* was beginning to look a little bit tired.

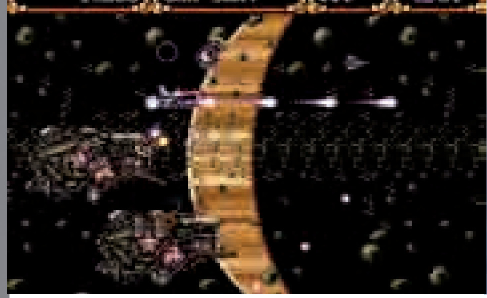
Arcades were big business between the late-Seventies and mid-Nineties, and the shoot-'em-up genre proved among the most popular. Gamers loved the often fast-paced gameplay and ability to amass huge scores, while arcade operators appreciated the quick turnover and huge sums of money the machines could generate – unless you were





THE COMPLETE GUIDE... SHOOT-'EM-UPS

» Forget *Space Harrier*, Sega's *Buck Rogers: Planet Of Zoom* was the first on-rails shooter.



really good one credit wouldn't go far. *Space Invaders* may have been the first, but it certainly wasn't the last, and the genre soon began to mutate into the many sub-genres that exist today.

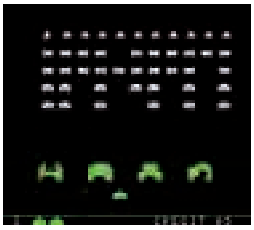
In 1979, hot on the heels of *Space Invaders*, came *Ozma Wars*, a vertical shooter that featured much faster enemies than *Space Invaders*, boasted a constantly dropping energy bar (that could be replenished by completing each wave and docking with a mother ship) and was the first game by Shin Nihon Kikaku – that's SNK if you didn't already know. It may have been wowing the crowds, but Atari designer Ed Logg was prepared to unleash his own shooter, the phenomenally successful *Asteroids*. This is not universally considered a true shoot-'em-up by some purists because it involves physics, but we feel it's important to mention all the same. Set in a floating field of asteroids, your aim was to simply fly around and blast them to pieces. The more boulders you shot, the more debris you created, so clever manoeuvring of your ship and steely reflexes were needed as the game progressed. Logg's creation was a runaway success and in 1987 spawned a sequel, *Blasteroids*, and numerous clones including *Satellite Attack*, *Super Stardust* and the recent *Super Stardust HD* for PlayStation Network.

Asteroids, like *Space Invaders* and *Ozma Wars* before it, was a black-and-white affair although they occasionally used colour overlays – *Space Invaders* being a classic example – but even as early as 1979 the genre exploded into colour thanks to Namco's *Galaxian*. Similar in style to Taito's classic, which also spawned its own sequel in 1979, *Galaxian* was one of the first games to feature true RGB colour, adding further drama to the *Space Invaders* formula by bombarding the player with kamikaze aliens. It is also one of the earliest examples of a combination score system, as the descending trio of aliens would generate a higher count if they were all shot down while they were making their descent.

The theme of aggressive attacking aliens would continue throughout the Eighties in *Galaxian's* numerous sequels, such as *Galaga*, *Gaplus* and *Galaga '88*, and would also take on an insectoid theme for Atari's *Centipede*, which was created by Ed Logg and Dona Bailey. Set at the bottom of a garden and featuring mushrooms, spiders, flies and other insects, *Centipede* was controlled via a trackball and spawned its very own successor, the far superior *Millipede*, as well as the by-now-predictable string of clones, ranging from titles like Alligata's *BugBlaster* to the recent remakes found on Xbox Live Arcade. We're only as far as the Eighties and the genre refuses to stand still. Atari's *Missile Command* enthralled gamers with its constantly descending missiles in 1980, while *Tempest* set new precedents by being the first arcade game to let you choose which level – and therefore which difficulty – you started on. *Tempest* also featured coloured vectors and distinctly different looking levels, kicking off the 'tube shooter' sub-genre that included the likes of Konami's superb 1983 hit *Gyruss* and Jeff Minter's wonderfully hypnotic *Tempest 2000* in 1994. We then had Nichibutsu's *Moon Cresta*, which was the first shoot-'em-up to feature a weapon upgrade, and the

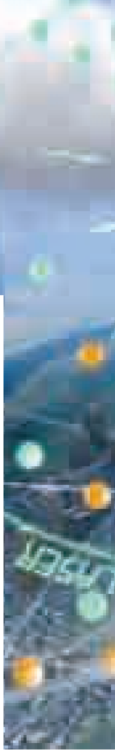
SOME SEMINAL SHOOTERS WERE RELEASED IN THE MID-EIGHTIES. THE GENRE AND ARCADES IN GENERAL WERE GROWING AT A PHENOMENAL RATE

SPACE INVADERS



Purists will no doubt expect us to name *Spacewar* as the genre's genesis, but *Space Invaders* was the nucleus for many shoot-'em-up fans, even if said fans no longer consider it a true shoot-'em-up. Released in 1978 and causing a huge yen shortage, Tomohiro Nishikado's game was unlike any other of the time and paved the way for hundreds of clones that followed both in the arcades and, later, on home computers and consoles.

Granted, it's incredibly simplistic when played today, especially when compared to later titles like *Gorf*, *Galaxian*, *Galaga* and Taito's very own sequels, but its influence can still be seen by anyone prepared to look. *Space Invaders* is steeped in pop culture and has been referenced in everything from The Pretenders song *Space Invader* to *Futurama* – it's an ageing classic, but a classic nonetheless. Who knows what would have happened to the shoot-'em-up genre (and videogames in general) if it never existed.



DEFINING MOMENTS

R-TYPE

THE BOSS TO END ALL BOSSES

It's been mimicked many times since but few shoot-'em-ups have managed to better the unforgettable third level of Irem's *R-Type*. Initially it looks like any other stage, with the odd plasma shot heading towards your nimble R-9 Fighter. As you progress, though, you eventually realise that the warning shots have been coming from the front end of a huge battleship, and like the opening Star Destroyer shot in *Star Wars*, the huge mother ship just keeps on coming.

Tactics immediately change as you not only have to worry about the ridiculous amount of weaponry it throws at you, but you also have to deal with the ship itself as it attempts to crush your craft at various intervals. It's a truly exciting sequence and totally redefined the traditional end-of-level boss. So much so, in fact, that it was repeated in the likes of *Pulstar*, *Trizeal*, *Thunder Force III*, *Phalanx*, *X-Multiply* and *Darius Gaiden* as well as practically every other *R-Type* Irem made.







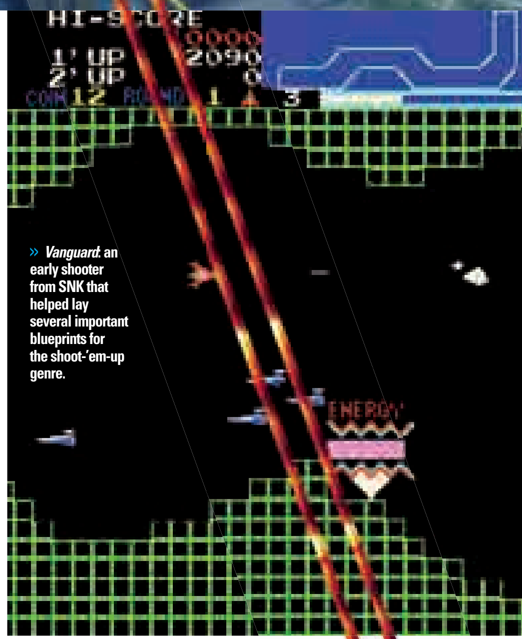
superb *Phoenix*, which featured the first proper videogame boss and a force field that could protect your ship for a limited time.

Eugene Jarvis's *Defender* also appeared in 1980, instantly grabbing attention thanks to its incredibly sharp visuals, insane speeds and frantic action. Yes, it was tougher than chewing through an old boot, but by God was it addictive – it was also one of the first arcade games to feature a smart bomb. *Dropzone*, *Attack Of The Mutant Camels* and *Chopper Command* were just a few of the titles that followed, including Jarvis's own sequel, *Stargate*, which upped the already convoluted controls by adding a cloaking device that rendered you temporarily invulnerable for a short period of time.

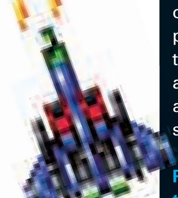
The innovations continued and just a year later such pioneering new features as robotic speech in Midway's *Gorf*, a dual-speed ship in *Solar Fox*, as well as the first example of ship capturing in *Galaxian*'s sequel *Galaga* were all vying for attention in the arcades. Konami's *Scramble*, from which *Gradius* was spawned, also appeared in 1981 and instantly impressed thanks to its varied looking levels, tough gameplay and the constant need to top up your fuel by shooting canisters – a feature that was borrowed for Carol Shaw's Atari 2600 hit *River Raid* a year later. SNK's *Vanguard* was the first example of multi-directional firing and horizontal and vertical scrolling, and it helped spawn the popular 'multi-directional shooter' that includes the likes of *Robotron: 2084*, *Time Pilot*, *Smash TV* and 2005's *Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved* on Xbox Live Arcade.

Namco may have found early success with the likes of *Galaxian* and *Galaga*, but it would set new standards with the release of *Xevious* in 1983. While other shooters already featured scrolling backdrops, most of these were simply star fields that gave no real sense of progression. *Xevious* upped the ante by delivering a constantly shifting landscape to fly over and added further depth by allowing you to drop bombs on the ground below you. Although underrated in the West, it was a huge success in Japan, and spawned numerous sequels and has recently popped up on both the Virtual Console and Xbox Live Arcade.

By the mid-Eighties the genre – and arcade games in general – was growing at a phenomenal rate and this era saw the release of some seminal shooters, many of which continued to push new boundaries. Capcom's *1942* in 1984 stood apart from its peers due to its World War II setting and spawned five sequels, inspiring Psikyo's *Strikers 1945* series, but the real star of the decade was the power-up that quickly started to appear in various titles. Having already featured in games like the



» ***Vanguard*: an early shooter from SNK that helped lay several important blueprints for the shoot-'em-up genre.**



THE BOTTOM LINE – THE EXPERT'S OPINION

SUBJECT: Marcus Pukropski
FROM: SideQuest Studios (developer of the forthcoming *Söldner-X* shoot-'em-up)

Retro Gamer: Why make your first game a shoot-'em-up?

Marcus Pukropski: The idea to make a shoot-'em-up initially came from Play-Asia, who approached me at the start of the year. We're huge fans of classic arcade games and want to prove that such games can still be fun, especially with a contemporary and revised presentation. We also don't want to compromise anything in terms of the technical backgrounds and the overall presentation of the game. If you look at other projects, you'll often see that – to reduce development costs – many developers don't give priority to issues such as a constant frame rate or loading times. In our opinion this is what gamers still demand and for good reason. All those aspects have to be taken care of so that the end result is a fun-to-play game.

Our target is to revive such partially forgotten virtues of true arcade games and *Söldner-X* is the ideal project. In addition, we are all self-confessed shoot-'em-up fans, especially our lead graphic artist who has been waiting for such an opportunity for years. On this account, we are very pleased about Play-Asia's offer as well as their confidence in us. It wasn't long before we agreed on everything; and meanwhile put together a distinguished team that is working with a lot of ambition and joy on this game. I am confident that the first results speak for themselves.

RG: What games have influenced the design of Söldner-X?

MP: I would be lying if I said that we didn't study other shooters before working on *Söldner-X*. We combined a lot of existing features that are very common in the genre with others that we had in our mind. Finally, *Söldner-X* will be a side-scrolling shoot-'em-up that greatly relies on tactical gameplay. The game features several difficulty modes but also some hidden parts as well. So while a casual gamer will be able to eventually complete the game, it's quite possible that they won't have seen everything it has to offer.

RG: Tell us a little about the upgrading system in Söldner-X.

MP: *Söldner-X* is no bullet shooter; instead it relies on more tactical elements. During each level, you will be able pick up weapons that, once in your repertoire, can be freely selected without abandoning another one. A total of five basic weapon types will be available. Each weapon features its own energy bar. While this bar automatically refills on your two standard weapons, it's only available for a limited time on more powerful ones. So you have to use your weapons wisely, especially toward the end of the game. Apart from five different weapons, you can pick up further extras that make each weapon stronger. There will also be extras that protect your arsenal from going back to default once you have died.

RG: What will make Söldner-X stand out from other shooters?

MP: The HD 720p graphics will give a pleasant new feeling to this genre. [As soon as] you start this game you will know it's a classical action game that is easy to learn, but it simply looks better than what you are used to from the genre. You will find different weather effects such as rain, fog and lightning in some levels and we've attached great importance to details in the background animations. Furthermore, our intention was not to make a game that only players who are fastest on the shooting button will be able to master. Though you will certainly find plenty of action in *Söldner-X*, you will need a lot of tactical skills and sensitivity to become really good. For instance, one key element will be which weapon is chosen to kill an enemy. All weapon types have diverse effects on different enemy types and can even influence what bonus item a destroyed foe will leave behind. Only if you adopt such knowledge will you develop your own game to the maximum.

RG: Which platform is Söldner-X coming out on?

MP: I am afraid I can't answer this at the moment. We will, however, be announcing a platform within the next couple of weeks or months. The game itself is anticipated to launch at the end of 2007.

SHOOT-'EM-UPS



THE BOTTOM LINE – THE EXPERT'S OPINION

SUBJECT: James Greenhalgh
FROM: Co-owner Shmups.com

Retro Gamer: Why do you think shoot-'em-ups became so popular?

James Greenhalgh: Being one of the first genres helped. Ever since, they've consistently been a type of game that would challenge players at a very base level. Kill or be killed and shoot for the high score.

RG: How have they evolved over the years?

JG: Some purists will flame me for this, but mostly it's the visuals. The core gameplay of kill or be killed is still intact. The genre branched off into different directions of course [with many key things that we now] consider a basic feature. A lot of people say the move from one to two axes was a big one, but they forget it had already been done before the single-axis games came along and established the genre with the mainstream.

Power-ups are another example; you don't often see a game without them any more – *Ikaruga*, being an exception. I don't mean smart bombs or Pac Pills here, but actual upgrades. Players are power-up junkies; part of the draw of these games is a feeling of power against overwhelming odds. It's something players strive for, not only because it helps them play the game but also just to feel stronger. The first one I can personally recall would be when you reclaim a captured ship in *Galaga*, allowing both ships to join and fight. This continues even now – levelling-up characters. Anyone played *Crackdown*? How about speed upgrades in street racers? If you want to see what happens when game designers really get generous with them, take a look at *Batsugun*.

Finally, bullet hell games. One more modern development is bullet storms. By necessity these are usually patterned – you can't have sniper tanks in *Raiden* shooting 300 bullets directly at the player, it's just not going to work. To up the visuals and difficulty, games have an ever-increasing number of bullets. Bullet fields are now patterns to learn and negotiate, just as scenery was. You're not expected to avoid them all, but to find the safe way through. The old way of doing things, when a bullet touching your ship in any way meant death, doesn't work here. So what they've done is reduce the size of the hit-box, the area of the player sprite that can collide with bullets, and even reduced bullet hit-boxes themselves. You can't reduce the sprites to those sizes; it would just look like tiny specks on the screen. Some games have used hit-boxes as a scoring method: 'grazing' bullets. *Psyvariar 2* took this to the extreme except they called it 'buzz' and you level up doing it.

RG: What do you think of the small official companies like G-Rev and Triangle Service that are still creating shoot-'em-ups?

JG: As long as they come up with good products it's an excellent thing. G-Rev is a more mature development team than Triangle Service which is pretty much a one-man band. I liked *Trizeal*, but it feels more like a homebrew game than a commercial release. *Border Down* and *Under Defeat* were excellent. Large companies aren't interested any more because [the next] *Final Fantasy* will sell more. Hopefully the purchase of Taito by Square Enix won't do as much damage to the future of ports as was rumoured.

RG: Last Hope didn't receive much praise when it was released. Why do you think this was?

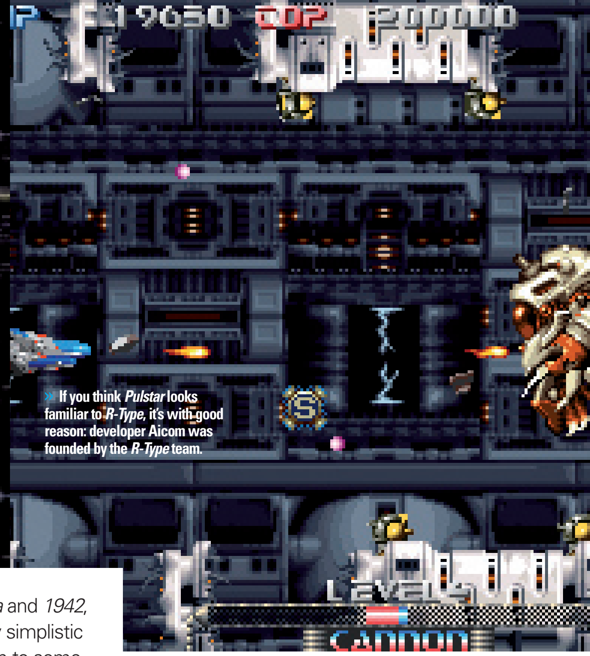
JG: Horizontal games aren't that popular any more. Also, while this is certain to upset the authors, it could have done with some external playtesting as there are some serious issues surrounding visibility and controls. I also think that people objected to paying as much for *Last Hope* as they had for *Ibara*, *Mushihimesama*, and *Under Defeat*.

RG: Where do you see the future for shoot-'em-ups?

JG: The genre has been dying for the best part of 15 years, someone just forgot to tell the likes of Cave, Moss and Milestone. They seem to be doing good business, and it's at the point now where a small number of home users are even buying brand new PCBs. Homebrew will continue but the mainstream has virtually no visibility of it. I also think Xbox Live Arcade could be key to a revival of interest, someone really needs to put *R-Type* on there for example, or *Radiant Silvergun* or *Raiden*. Something good that will grab gamers' interest.



» Witness videogaming's first ever boss in all its gaudy glory.



» If you think *Pulstar* looks familiar to *R-Type*, it's with good reason: developer Aicom was founded by the *R-Type* team.

aforementioned *Moon Cresta* and *1942*, the power-up was a relatively simplistic affair that paled in comparison to some of the impressive add-ons that shooters were set to receive.

Data East's 1984 title *B-Wings* allowed you to select quite an array of power-ups (and jettison them if you found something more beneficial) while in 1985 Konami's *Gradius* gave the player far more control and allowed you to choose the power-up you required from a bar at the bottom of the screen. Of course, the snag was that you had to collect certain items first in order to highlight them. SNK Playmore's 1985 game *ASO* (also known as *Armored Scrum Object*) took the concept further still by allowing you to fly over different icons that would subsequently give you a variety of effects. And let's not forget titles like *Zanac*, *Slap Fight*, *Salamander*, *Thunder Force II* and *Aleste*, as well as many others which all added their own twists on the power-up theme.

It was Irem's *R-Type*, however, that really enhanced the power-up system thanks to its amazingly over-the-top weapons: most notably 'the force' which could be attached to the front or back of your R-9 fighter, or flung out to fire from afar. Its influence can be seen in a variety of titles from Irem's own sequels to the complete levels – although they obviously made it much easier.

While *R-Type* was helping to define the future of power-ups, games like Konami's *Twinbee* and Sega's *Buck Rogers: Planet Of Zoom* were spawning new sub-genres: namely cute-'em-ups and on-rail shooters. Konami's *Parodius*, which was a parody of its *Gradius* series; Sega's *Fantasy Zone*, which was also the first shooter to feature a weapons shop; Success's *Cotton*; and Sky Think System's *Harmful Park* are all excellent examples of the genre, which are noted for their cute enemies, ridiculously bizarre bosses and often incredibly humorous power-ups.

On-rail shooters on the other hand tended to be pseudo-3D or 3D titles and typically featured a lone fighter flying into the screen and mowing down wave after wave of enemies. Some of the most famous examples from Sega are *Space Harrier*, *After Burner*, the *Panzer Dragoon* series, and the hauntingly trippy *Rez*. Other examples include the likes of Nintendo's *StarFox* and Game Arts' *Silpheed*. Oh, and while we're talking influences, spare a thought for Taito's *Darius* franchise which featured

> WHILE R-TYPE WASN'T THE FIRST TO USE A BIOLOGICAL THEME, IT WAS THE MOST INFLUENTIAL AND SET A NEW PRECEDENT FOR LEVEL DESIGN

likes of SNK's *Prehistoric Isle In 1930* to *Katakis* on Commodore 64, a game so similar to *R-Type* that Irem asked creator Manfred Trenz to code the C64 version of the monstrous hit. *R-Type*'s influences go beyond just power-ups though. While *R-Type* was not the first shoot-'em-up to use a biological theme, it's easily the most influential and also set a new precedent for level design insofar as power-ups were not necessarily needed to a distinctive level-branching system, a widescreen mode, weapons that could power up, and, in later games, the ability to control enemy craft.

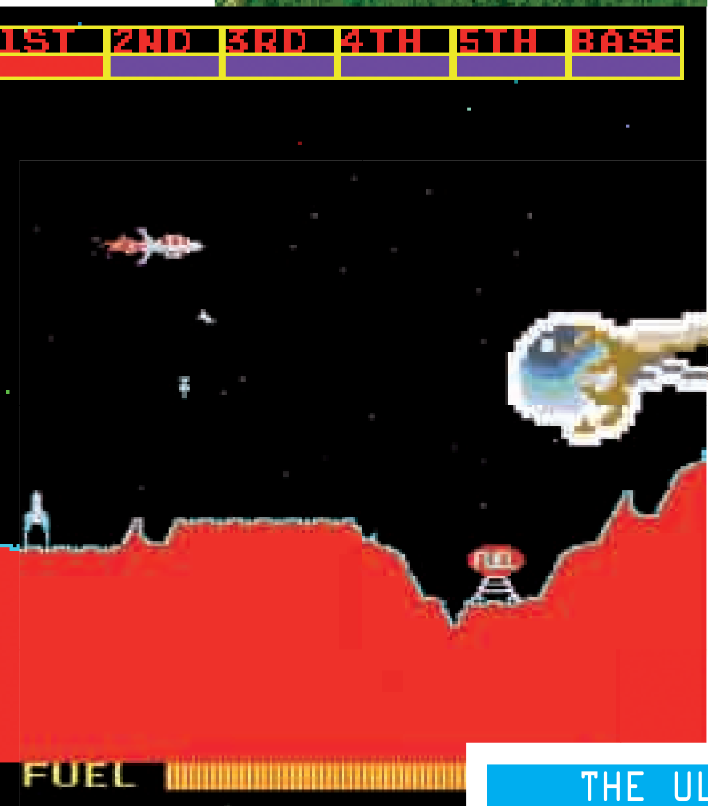
Despite the overwhelming success of the shoot-'em-up in the late-Seventies and through the Eighties, the advent of three-dimensional gaming saw the once successful genre shunned by the average gamer in







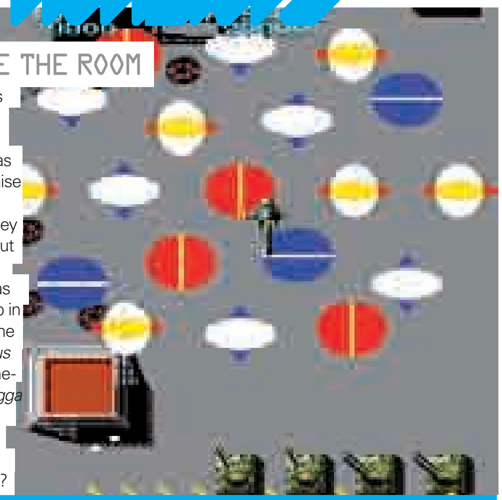
» Namco's *Xevious* featured a variety of different locations and also allowed you to bomb certain objects.



DEFINING MOMENTS

TIGER HELI

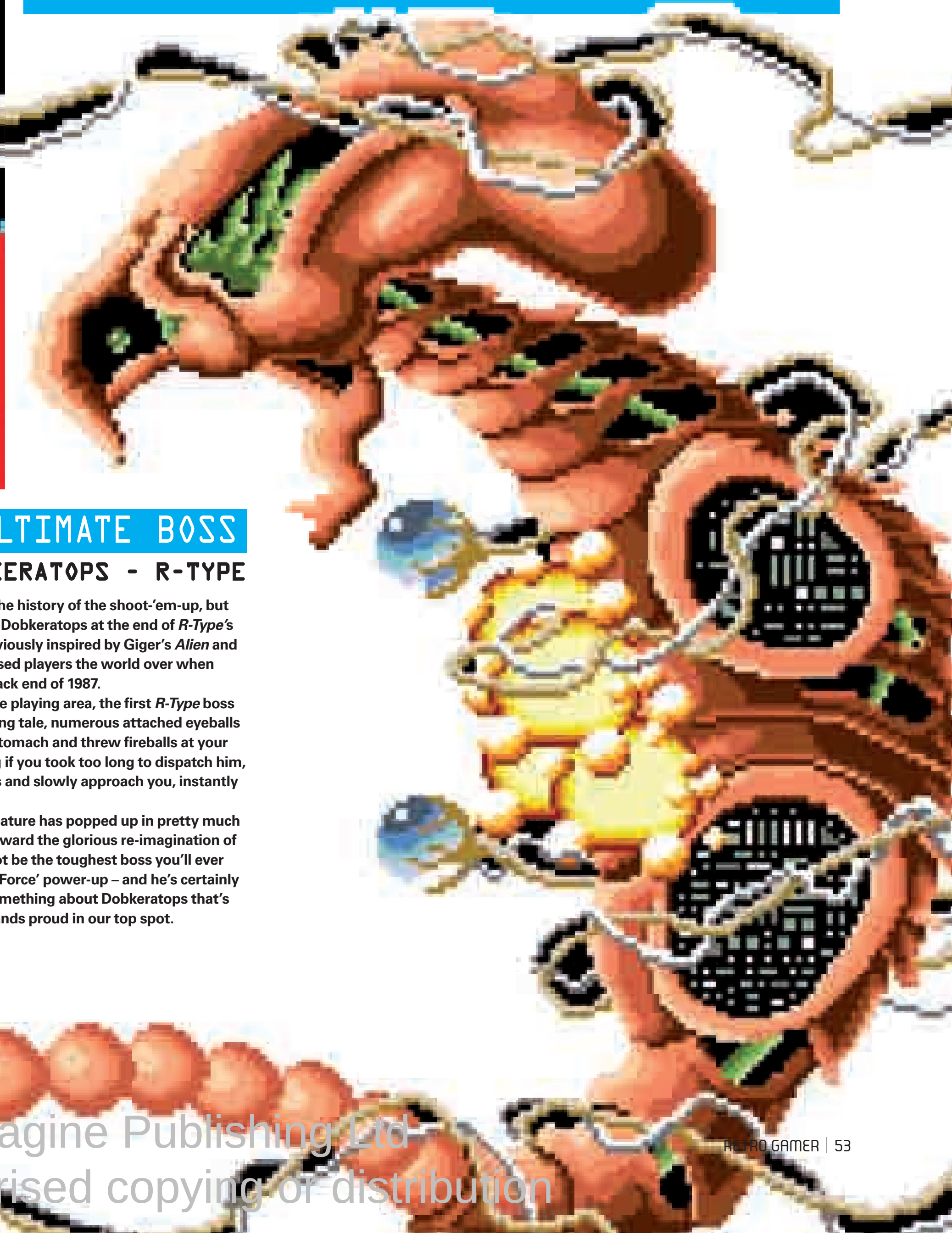
BOOM, SHAKE, SHAKE, SHAKE THE ROOM



While *Defender* was one of the first shoot-'em-ups to feature a screen-clearing smart-bomb, it was something of an anticlimax for anyone that used it. Granted it did the job of clearing everything that was on screen, but you didn't actually see anything. Praise be then for those clever bods at Taito who realised that it would be far more satisfying for gamers if they had something to look at while they were wiping out a screen full of foes.

It may seem quite insignificant now, but this was arguably one of the first examples of a smart bomb in the genre, although it would be far from the last. The huge skull in *Truxton*, the deadly black hole of *Darius Gaiden* that sucks everything into it and the over-the-top explosions that feature in Raizing's *Battle Garegga* are just a few of the most notable explosions that spring to mind, and its all thanks to a tiny little helicopter in a shoot-'em-up that features no flying enemies of any description. Who'd have thought it?





THE ULTIMATE BOSS

DOBKERATOPS – R-TYPE

There have been a great many iconic bosses in the history of the shoot-'em-up, but few can compare with your first encounter with Dobkeratops at the end of *R-Type's* first level. Like the rest of *R-Type*, this boss is obviously inspired by Giger's *Alien* and the end result is a terrifying creation that terrorised players the world over when they came across him in a dusty arcade at the back end of 1987.

Incredibly imposing and taking up most of the playing area, the first *R-Type* boss cut a memorable figure with his enormous lashing tale, numerous attached eyeballs and a little green critter that popped out of his stomach and threw fireballs at your tiny R-9 Fighter. He became even more terrifying if you took too long to dispatch him, as he would eventually cut loose from his chains and slowly approach you, instantly crushing you upon contact.

Indeed, such was his impact that the ugly creature has popped up in pretty much every *R-Type* game since, with a special nod toward the glorious re-imagination of him that appears in *R-Type Delta*. He might not be the toughest boss you'll ever meet – he's incredibly easy to beat with 'The Force' power-up – and he's certainly not the best you face in *R-Type*, but there's something about Dobkeratops that's instantly iconic and for that reason alone he stands proud in our top spot.

THE COMPLETE GUIDE...

SHOOT-'EM-UPS

TOP 5

FANTASTIC POWER-UPS, OUTRAGEOUS BOSSES, INTRICATE LEVEL DESIGN, SCREEN-CLEARING SMART BOMBS. HERE'S THE VERY BEST THAT THE SHOOT-'EM-UP GENRE HAS TO OFFER...



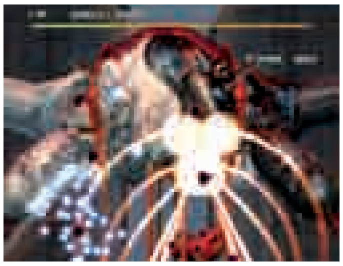
DoDonPachi

DonPachi was a brilliant calling card, but Cave's sequel cemented its reputation as a shoot-'em-up developer without equal, especially where danmaku games were concerned. While *DonPachi* and its sequel span only two years, the gameplay feels decades apart. *DoDonPachi* is faster paced, features a superior scoring system, and turns bullets into point-earning stars when a certain smart bomb is dropped, tossing bullets about like confetti. It's a thrilling ride that is still considered the definitive danmaku title. Get the PSone and Saturn versions if you don't have the space for the original PCB board.



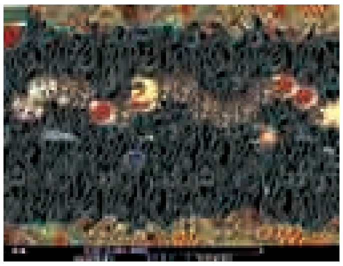
Gradius V

Like a fine wine this sumptuous shooter gets better with age. Stunningly beautiful, *Gradius V* is the perfect example of a finely honed shoot-'em-up and deserves to be experienced by anyone with access to a PlayStation 2. Practically every aspect of Treasure's excellent shooter is flawless: from the intricately crafted levels to the enormously challenging bosses – and it's a pleasure to play. Granted, some will no doubt baulk at the game's insane difficulty and accuse Treasure of resting on its laurels, but if there's a better horizontally scrolling shooter out there, we've yet to play it.



Ikaruga

Ikaruga was Treasure's attempt to take the standard shoot-'em-up themes of old in a bold new direction. What makes it unique is that its two-tone ship can only be destroyed by bullets of the opposite colour – bullets of the same polarity are harmlessly absorbed. With enemy waves constantly switching polarities the action quickly becomes hectic, and that's before you've even considered creating continual chains by shooting down three enemies of the same colour. Your craft's ability to eat bullets means that its Bullet Eater mode (completing levels without killing anything) is like nothing else around.



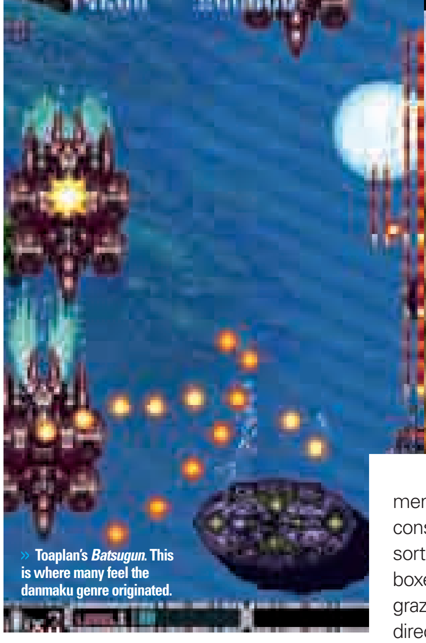
R-Type

Yes, it's been superseded by many better shooters, but the original *R-Type* remains one of the finest horizontally scrolling shooters you can play. From the moment your R-9 fighter soars across the screen you know you're in for one hell of a ride. And Irem certainly doesn't disappoint. Its biomechanical, Giger-inspired visuals are still as slick as the first day you witnessed them, the force remains an amazing gameplay mechanic and the level design is to die for. Throw in a selection of iconic bosses, some catchy tunes and devious attack patterns and *R-Type's* status in our top five is assured.

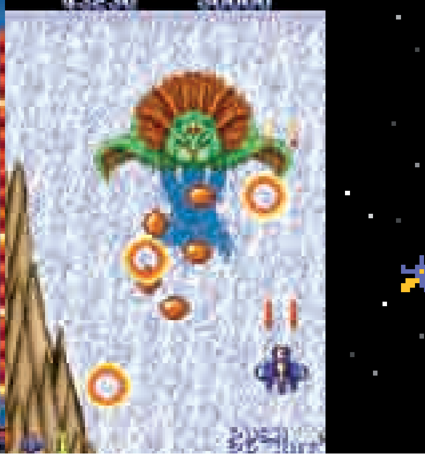


Defender

A slow-burning affair, *Defender* still managed to shift 60,000 units. With its kinetic gameplay, complex scoring system, distinct visuals and complicated control set-up *Defender* certainly made an impact. However, it wasn't for everyone and wrestling with the intimidating controls was the biggest obstacle that *Defender* presented. Those that stuck with it however, found a deep shooter that rewarded perseverance. While an arcade-perfect version exists on XBLA, the 360 joypad sadly doesn't do the game justice. A shame, as you won't get much change from a grand if you want to buy an original arcade cab.



» Toaplan's *Batsugun*. This is where many feel the danmaku genre originated.



favour of realistic driving games, 3D fighters and gun games like *Virtua Cop* and *House Of The Dead*. Nevertheless, shoot-'em-ups continued to survive – particularly in Japan – but they no longer dominated the arcades as they once did. Sure games were still getting made, but by now the shoot-'em-up was dead to the majority of gamers.

memory, danmaku games required considerable skill in order to make any sort of progress, and featured small hit boxes meaning that your craft could graze bullets without dying – although direct contact with the hit box caused the loss of a life. Popular examples of the genre include 1996's *DoDonPachi*, *Giga Wing* in 1999, *Psyvariar 2* in 2003, 1998's *Radiant Silvergun* and *Ikaruga* in 2000 – although the last two are generally considered 'methodical shooters', despite sharing many qualities of danmaku titles.

When Treasure announced that it would be making one final game for

SHOOT-'EM-UPS ARE BACK AND HAVE NEVER LOOKED STRONGER, AND IT'S ALL THANKS TO THE MOST RECENT GENERATION OF CONSOLES

Fortunately, a little perseverance and access to an import Saturn or PlayStation allowed lucky fans access to some real gems and it was the arcade release of Toaplan's *Batsugun* in 1993 that heralded the beginning of one more sub-genre: known as the danmaku, or bullet hell shooter.

As the translation suggests, danmaku titles upped the ante considerably by simply filling the screen with ridiculous bullet patterns for your ship to negotiate. Whereas early titles often rewarded

Sega's Dreamcast, little did gamers know that the machine would become the official flagship for the once insanely popular genre. Created by a four-man team and released in September 2002 – some 18 months after Sega ceased production on the 128-bit console – *Ikaruga* gained worldwide popularity with shoot-'em-up fans. Thanks to a lot of the arcade shooters of the time being Naomi based (a near identical hardware system to that of the Dreamcast), many other shooters were quickly ported to Sega's

DEFINING MOMENTS

RADIANT SILVERGUN

SETTING THE STANDARD



It would be easy for us to shoehorn Treasure's magnificent opus into our top five, but there are more worthy titles. It does deserve praise however, because it remains one of the most polished shooters in existence. Unlike many titles in the genre, there are no power-ups in *Radiant Silvergun*. Instead you're given instant access to seven distinct weapons ranging from a standard forward-firing shot to a small sword that destroys anything it touches. Add a scintillating soundtrack by *FFXII* composer Hitoshi Sakimoto, loads of over-the-top bosses and some devilishly designed levels and *Radiant's* lofty reputation is instantly justified. Sadly, the only arcade port appeared on Sega Saturn and now sells for £100. If you're not prepared to go down the MAME route, you may want to break open your piggy bank.





» *Gorf* is important for featuring the first speech in *any* videogame, let alone a shoot-'em-up.



» He's not as memorable as *R-Type's* Dobkeratop, but the Golden Ogre from *Darius Gaiden* still makes an impact.



» *Söldner-X* is a collaboration between Play-Asia and SideQuest Studios due out later this year.

console, mainly because it was highly cost effective. *Border Down*, *Castle Shikigami 2*, *Chaos Field*, *Psyvariar II: The Will To Fabricate*, *Trizeal* and *Under Defeat* have all been released since *Ikaruga* first appeared, while *Karous*, *Trigger Heart Exelica* and *Last Hope* were all released this year.

Sony's PlayStation 2 also proved to be the perfect breeding ground for the revitalised genre with a whole range of excellent shooters, including the stupendously brilliant *Gradius V*, *R-Type Final*, *Ibara*, *Raiden III*, *ESPGaluda*, *Mushihimesama* and many more. Of course, many of the PlayStation 2 titles and all of the aforementioned Dreamcast ones were only released in Japan, meaning that casual gamers will miss out unless they are prepared to import.

Amazingly, after what feels like a lifetime of being kept on the sidelines, shoot-'em-ups are back in full force and have never looked stronger and it's all thanks to the most recent generation of consoles. With all the systems offering downloadable game services and gamers wanting quick blasts to fit in between sessions of *Gears Of War* and *Eledees*, the shoot-'em-up has found a new home and the number of games being released is growing considerably every month.

If you own an Xbox 360 you'll have access to arcade versions of *Galaga*, *Centipede*, *Defender*, *Geometry Wars*, *Gyruss* and *Scramble*, while Nintendo's Virtual Console offers everything from the NES version of *Xevious* to PC Engine greats like *Blazing Lasers*, *Super Star Soldier* and *Soldier Blade*. Sony's PS3 on the other hand has titles like *Super Stardust HD*, *R-Type Delta* and *R-Types*, although unfortunately the majority of these games are only available in Japan at the moment.

Smaller independent titles are also blossoming. Although savaged by such sites as Shmups.com and Neo-Geo.com, *Last Hope* was ported from Neo Geo to Dreamcast. However, Play-Asia has recently announced that it has a shooter of its own in the works – a collaboration with German-based SideQuest Studios. "The shoot-'em-up genre has a very long history but has unfortunately almost vanished into thin air," reveals Play-Asia's Tom Wiesinger about the reasoning behind the new project. "Nowadays not many big studios are still supporting this genre, so it's up to mainly smaller developers to work in this field. Sadly, the same is happening to many games with classic two-dimensional gameplay. At Play-Asia we are always very excited about every new shoot-'em-up that we are carrying. So the idea came up to support a studio that shares the same passion as we do and finally release an excellent product that gamers will love." It would appear that gaming's most influential genre has finally come full circle, let's hope that there are enough inquisitive gamers prepared to discover its many wonders and keep the genre going for another three decades.

THE BOTTOM LINE – THE EXPERT'S OPINION

SUBJECT: Tim Hellwig/Rene Hellwig
FROM: NG:DEV.TEAM

Retro Gamer: Why make a shmup?
Rene Hellwig: It has been clear from the beginning that we wanted to make a game in the *R-Type* and *Last Resort* mould, so we didn't need a great discussion to make our final decision.

RG: Why make the game for AES and not a more cost-effective console?
RH: Neo Geo is just better. Maybe it would have been easier to release a game just for NGCD, but if you've ever held an AES game in your hands, you'll understand why we decided that way. Carts feature no loading times either.

RG: Shmups.com was negative about Last Hope, how do you feel about this?
Tim Hellwig: We're a little disappointed people judged the game without allowing it to reveal its potential. It seems players are spoiled by Cave-style games, they just can't seem to play the old-school games with background collision and parallax scrolling any more.
RH: People expected an *R-Type*-meets-Cave title. As a game that uses the old-school formulas, you can't expect modern features like pink bullets. Those things weren't invented back then. They also underrated the tactical component and wondered why they couldn't progress further. *Last Hope* isn't a spacewalk but it's not as hard as people think – and it's always fair. Strangely enough, less experienced players had less trouble getting into the game.

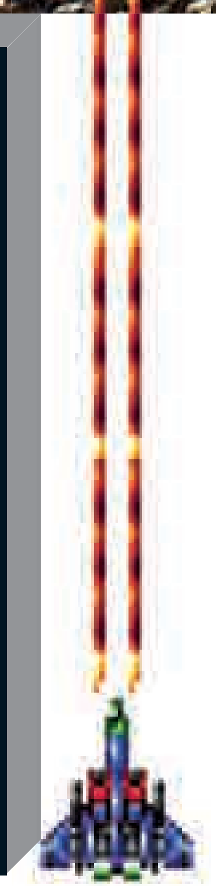
RG: Are there any valid points that you would consider for future projects?
TH: *Last Hope* was very old-school – more a personal tribute than anything else. It features game mechanics that some players dislike, such as restart points, glowing debris, explosions overlapping bullets and more. But to be honest I don't believe most people really had problems with the debris in DC mode, they just capitulated early.

RG: Westerners don't know how to make a decent shoot-'em-up. Discuss.
RH: Many Western shooters just don't cater to the taste of the majority of 'shoot-'em-uppers'. Japan produces a lot of trash, too, but they have created so many classics that some may think that only Japanese developers are able to do that.

RG: Do you plan to make another shooter? If so, can you tell us about it?
RH: Indeed. Our next try will be a score-based vertical-scrolling shooter, again originally developed for Neo Geo. We won't forget the Dreamcast fans either.

RG: What do you think about Play-Asia's announcement of Söldner-X?
RH: That was sudden; we didn't know anything about it. It seems they're trying to get on the wave caused by *Last Hope*. Since the comparable *Broken Thunder*, I'm not sure it's wise to announce a game and not show any screenshots or gameplay. As an independent developer, we hope it doesn't break the image of independently produced games. Making a bad game is one thing; releasing an unfinished product is just disastrous.

RG: Where will the genre be in five years?
TH: More anime chicks, more bullets, more 3D and less fun. But we'll provide an alternative to the Cave mainstream by creating our own 2D shoot-'em-ups.



This article previously appeared in games™ issue 59

SKWEEK

THINK PINK!



- » **PUBLISHER:** LORICIELS
- » **RELEASED:** 1989
- » **GENRE:** PUZZLE
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** AMSTRAD CPC 464
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £1



HISTORY

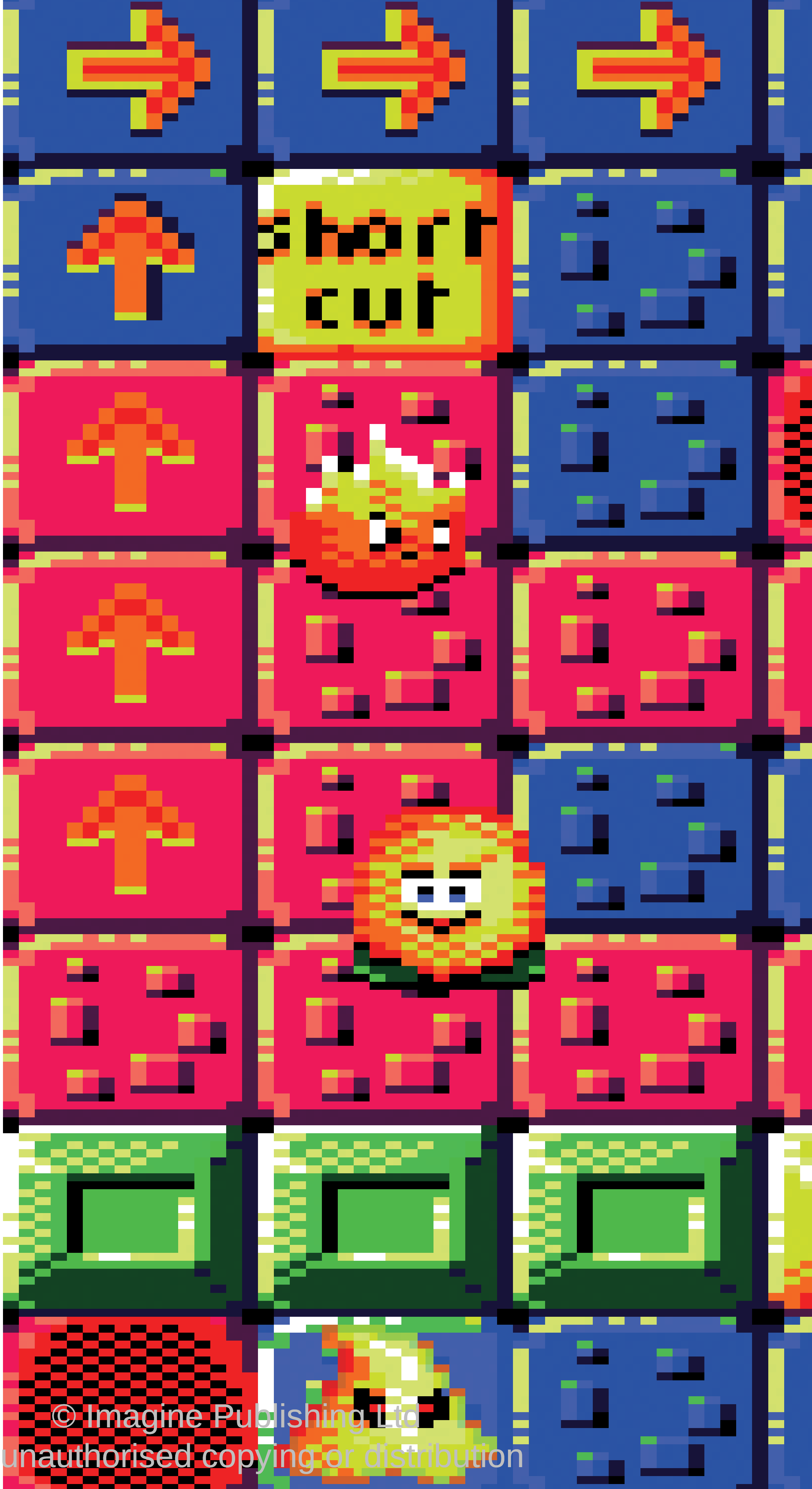
Plagiarism used to be rife in the videogames industry – indeed, some would argue that it still is. Look back at last month's Retro Revival of *Monsters* on the BBC and it's obvious that as good a game as it is, it is also an unashamed rip off of Universal's *Space Panic*.

Sadly, games like *Monsters* were the rule rather than the exception, so it always makes us happy when a title does come along that, rather than simply trying to pass itself off as the original game, actually dares to do something a little different.

Loriciel's *Skweek* is one such title. Effectively a super-charged version of *Q*bert*, *Skweek* cast you as a loveable ball of fluff, whose aim in life was to change blue tiles to pink by walking over them. Each level would have a certain amount of tiles to change, and once completed, you could head on to the next challenge.

Obviously, simply walking over tiles was never going to make a fun game, so Loriciels beefed everything up by including a number of specific enemies and hazards to negotiate; oh, and special tiles that affected *Skweek* in specific ways. Monsters would continually spawn around the stages (which would often be several screens in size), certain tiles could only be passed over in a certain direction (designated by handily placed arrows), while others were made of ice and could cause *Skweek* to fall to his doom.

Fortunately, the little fur ball was far from defenceless, and as well as being able to attack his enemies with a fireball (well that's what it looked like), he was also able to pick up power-ups that would increase his chances of survival even further. It was even possible to complete a level immediately by simply collecting a set amount of teddy bears (no really), although the longer you hung around waiting for them to appear, the more likely you were to get picked off. A classic puzzler that is as difficult as it is cute.













Year released: 1981 **discontinued:** 1986

BBC Microcomputer Model A - 16K RAM
Original price: £235
Max screen resolution: 320x256 pixels (Mode 4)

BBC Microcomputer Model B - 32K RAM
Original price: £335
Max screen resolution: 640x240 pixels (Mode 0)

6502 processor running at 2 MHz OS: BBC BASIC housed in 32K ROM Tape interface by default, optional floppy disk interface available. Four sound channels: 3 melodic, 1 noise. The Tube interface offers additional processor to be added. Compatibility with Acorn Econet.



RETROINSPECTION

BBC MICRO

LEGAL WRANGLINGS, PLAGIARISM, FINANCIAL RUIN, ARSON... WHO SAID THE BBC MICRO WAS JUST A TOOL FOR SCHOOL? STUART GOODWIN LOOKS BEYOND THE CLASSROOM, AND FINDS AN OFTEN MISUNDERSTOOD CLASSIC, AS WELL AS SOME OF THE BEST GAMES OF ALL TIME...

The story of the BBC Microcomputer can be traced back to a number of unexpected locations, most notably one of Sir Clive Sinclair's companies, the warehouses of a Welsh fruit machine manufacturer, and even a cattle shed in Harrogate. Since 1966, Chris Curry – an employee of Sir Clive Sinclair – had worked behind the scenes for Sinclair Radionics, developing a number of products including calculators and wristwatches, as well as a pre-Sinclair C5 electric car. Following financial problems, Sir Clive shifted focus from Radionics, and encouraged Curry to work for another of his companies – Science Of Cambridge (SoC). SoC would later become Sinclair Computers Ltd.

Curry's own focus shifted to microcomputers and, in particular, a microcomputer kit that SoC had developed. Sinclair, however, failed to back further development of the kit and, in December 1978, Curry formed his own company alongside a friend: Austrian-born physics graduate Hermann Hauser. Their new venture, Cambridge Processor Unit (CPU), quickly found a customer in Ace Coin Equipment Ltd, for whom they designed fruit machine controllers. The following year, CPU became Acorn Computers Ltd.

In 1979, Acorn's first Microcomputer, the System 1, was launched, designed by computer scientist Roger (now Sophie) Wilson. Back in 1977, Wilson had designed a sophisticated automated cow feeder, based around a 6502 processor, for a farm in Harrogate. "The cow feeder led directly to the System 1," Wilson recalls. "Hermann wanted someone capable of building an 'electronic pocket book' – we might call it a PDA now. I showed him the designs for the cow feeder, and for my own computer, and he challenged me to build it."

Systems 1-5 were designed primarily for engineering and laboratory use. By 1979, however, Sinclair was working on the ZX80, and Curry pushed for Acorn to turn its attention to the home computer market, severing his remaining ties with Sinclair in the process. The first fruits were The Atom in 1980. "This was a time when you were expected to be able to solder in order to use a computer – most machines came as kits," says David Braben, co-author of *Elite*. The basic Atom, featuring 2K of RAM, sold in kit form for £120, or, for £50 more, ready assembled, while an expanded model featuring 12K was also available. "For its time it was a fantastic machine," Braben continues, "one advantage of the kit mentality was that machines had very open designs – circuit diagrams were freely available – and so expanding in unconventional ways was quite practical. Pretty soon my machine was twice the original speed, and had 48K of RAM!" One notable feature of the Atom was support for Econet, Acorn's local area network, which allowed 250 computers to be networked together.

The machine was considered a relatively successful entry into the market for Acorn. However, some of the technical staff within Acorn

INSTANT EXPERT

The working title for the BBC Micro was Proton.

The computers took the name 'BBC' as the computers were used at the heart of the corporation's Computer Literacy Project.

Other computers in the running for the BBC contract included the Grundy NewBrain.

Two models of the BBC Micro were launched in November 1981 – Model A, priced £235, and Model B, priced £335.

The BBC Micro is powered by a 6502 processor. This processor also powers the Commodore PET and VIC-20, as well as the Atari 400 and 800.

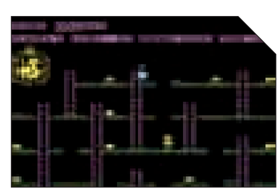
A second processor can be added to the BBC Micro via an interface called The Tube, which significantly boosts the computer's performance.

A cut-down version of the BBC B – the Electron – was launched in August 1983, priced £199.

Problems with supplying adequate numbers of Electrons for Christmas 1983 placed Acorn under severe financial pressure.

The BBC B+ launched in 1984, which featured double or even quadruple the amount of memory found in a standard BBC B.

Acorn was eventually taken over by Olivetti in 1985, and released its final 8-bit computers – the Master series – in 1986.



BBC MICRO



» This press pic conveyed to consumers that, with the BBC B, the sky really was the limit.

were unconvinced. "We simply didn't like the chips in the Atom," says Wilson, "in particular the MC6847, which was an NTSC-only video chip." By the time the Atom launched, Acorn was already hard at work on its next machine, the Proton. "The Proton had been in development before the Atom conceptually," Wilson continues, "though the impetus to start it as a real project only came after the Atom was financially successful."

In 1981, BBC Education launched the Computer Literacy Project, revolving around a ten-part television series. "The aim of the project is to introduce interested adults to the world of computers and computing," said the press release, "and to provide the opportunity for viewers to learn through direct experience how to program and use a microcomputer." The BBC wanted to build the project around a machine capable of performing a multitude of tasks, which could then be used to demonstrate the fundamentals of computing on TV, and contacted several British-based computer companies. Several computers were considered, most notably the Sinclair-affiliated Grundy NewBrain, as well as Acorn's own Proton. "The project only gained real momentum with the impending visit of the BBC people



» If you were going to treat yourself to a BBC Computer, then this expansive pach was surely the one to go for.

"THANKS TO THE LINK-UP WITH THE BROADCASTER, THE BBC COMPUTERS WERE A CONSIDERABLE SUCCESS IN THE EDUCATION MARKET"

to see a Proton prototype – which didn't exist at the time," recalls Wilson. "We had a week to build it."

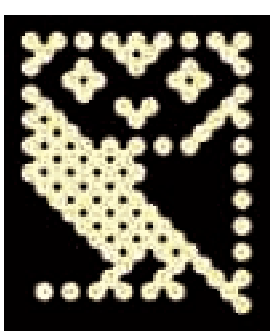
Despite the tight time frame, the prototype was up and running within a week, and impressed the BBC representatives sufficiently to ensure Acorn obtained the high-profile link up. "I guess we got the contract partly because what we were building anyway was close to what they wanted, and partly because they saw that our engineering was good enough to make it happen," says Wilson. What had been known as the Proton, hit the shelves in November 1981 as the BBC Microcomputer System, just like Systems 1-5 and the Atom, another computer based around the 8-bit 6502 processor found in Wilson's cow feeder.

Two different flavours of the BBC Micro were initially available – the 16K Model A, and the 32K Model B, launching at £235 and £335 respectively. Demand outstripped supply, however, and increased production costs soon caused these prices to rise to £299 and £399. "A BBC Model A was the first computer I owned," recalls Gary Partis, author of several games including *Psycastria* and *Sphere Of Destiny*. "It was a Christmas present in 1981 which didn't get delivered until March 1982." The Model B soon emerged as the bigger seller of the two, and many Model A users eventually invested in Acorn's A to B upgrade option on the cheaper model.

The BBC Micro saw the first outing of Wilson's excellent BBC BASIC, a powerful but simple language, which provided many users with their first exposure to computer programming. "BBC BASIC is a compromise between my advanced interpreter of the day and the BBC's desire to keep the language 'standard'," continues Wilson. "It felt significant at the time – a fast BASIC which was convenient to



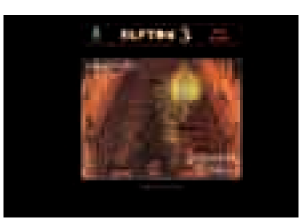
» For all lovers of the BBC Micro – and a bit of extra publicity for Micro Power to boot.



» This symbol for the BBC Computer Literacy Project was found on all BBC Micros.

COMMUNITY - THE BEST BBC WEBSITES

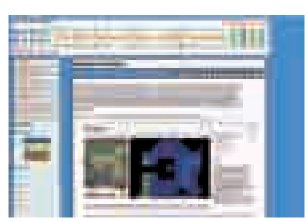
Stairway To Hell
www.stairwaytohell.com
The most vibrant BBC and Electron site on the web. It has an active forum, plenty of interesting articles and an excellent 'Lost & Found' section, telling all about recently unearthed gems. It also has scans and interviews aplenty, as well as links to emulators, clones and remakes of classic Acorn titles.



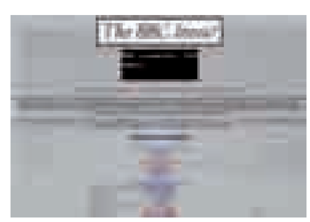
Acorn Electron World
www.acornelectron.co.uk
Disk images galore, including the archives of EUG, a disk-based BBC and Electron magazine which originated in 1991, chock-full of demos, reviews, utilities, remakes and originals. The site also contains demos and games from the BBC PD archives, as well as comprehensive scans of every issue of *Electron User*.



The BBC Games Archive
www.beebgames.com
Comprehensive site detailing almost every game released on the BBC. Thankfully, it's not just talk, though – there's also plenty to play, including unreleased games and demos. Particularly of note is the high-score section – think you can beat 1,026,690 for *Chuckie Egg*?

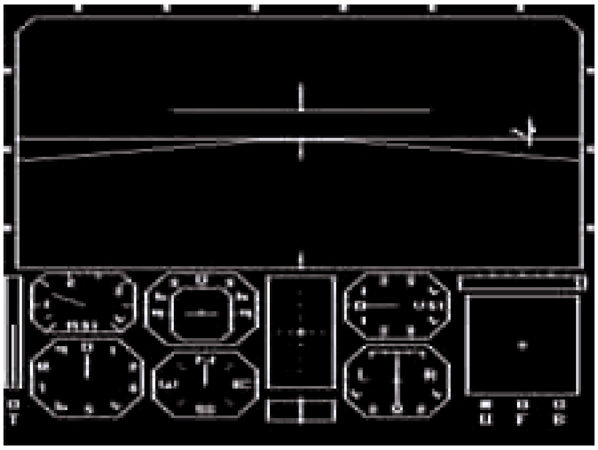


The BBC Lives!
http://bbc.nvg.org/
Sadly, it's been several years since this website was last updated, but The BBC Lives! remains a tremendous resource for would-be bedroom programmers, featuring, as it does, an awe-inspiring array of manuals and documentation; plus, emulators, games, utilities and much, much more.





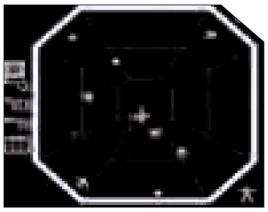
» Geoff Crammond's *Space Invaders* clone, *Super Invaders*, kick-started his involvement with the BBC.



» *Aviator*, a spitfire sim, built on Crammond's success, with G-forces that could tear the wings off.



» Fourth Dimension's *E-Type* – a conversion of its Archimedes title – was an excellent *OutRun*-style racer by Gordon Key, and was a welcome arcade alternative to the accurate simulation, that was *Revs*. However, released in 1990 – late in the BBC's commercial life – it was missed by many gamers who had already moved on to 16-bit machines.



» *Free Fall*, was an intriguing space-fighting game, by *Elite* co-author Ian Bell. Despite an excellent game engine, it was hampered by a slightly unwieldy control system, and was far too easy. It was often possible to leave the game running without any intervention, and your character wouldn't die for several minutes.

use, with many advanced features." Other innovations in the BBC included an interface known as The Tube, which enabled a second processor to be added to beef up the computer's power.

Thanks to the link-up with the broadcaster, the BBC computers were a considerable success in the education market. In addition, sales were bolstered thanks to an initiative started by the Department of Education and Science, which allowed local education authorities in the UK to obtain computers at discounted prices. While other computers were available under the scheme, the BBC Micro's established reputation as a tool for learning prompted many schools to buy Beeb. Throughout the Eighties, titles such as Acornsoft's *Podd* and 4Mation's *Granny's Garden* were commonplace in many primary and secondary schools.

The BBC branding soon showed itself to be as much curse as blessing, however, as the BBC Micro found itself seen as something that belonged in the corner of the classroom, a conception fuelled all the more as Spectrum and Commodore computers emerged surrounded by a huge games industry. Although never on as large a scale, a substantial games industry did grow alongside the BBC's popularity, with around 1,200 titles released throughout its life. And key to its emergence was Acorn itself, through its own, highly prolific Acornsoft software label. "Acornsoft were fantastic and a joy to work with. They were both gamers and huge fans of all the technology behind games," reveals Braben. "In the beginning I thought they set a great standard for everyone to have to live up to," adds Peter Johnson, the man behind hit titles such as *Overdrive* and *Impossible Mission*. "Most of their conversions were pretty accurate – things like *Planetoid* (*Defender*) or *Snapper* (*Pac-Man*) were great in their day."

"I saw BBC Micros at a local computer club, and was so gobsmacked by the speed and colourfulness of *Planetoid* that I decided I had to have one," says Jason Sobell, co-author of titles such as *Future Shock* and *Vindaloo*, "so I sold my Spectrum 48K to one of my college lecturers and went and picked up a shiny new 32K BBC Micro." An outstanding conversion of the arcade classic, the late Neil Raine's game was originally issued under the title of *Defender*, before Acornsoft succumbed to pressure from Wilson. "Some of the Acornsoft games, such as *Planetoid*, were the early pacesetters in my opinion," adds Richard Hanson, who would soon find legal pressures of his own to contend with. Johnson's version of *Q*Bert* also hit the shelves under the original's title, without permission for the licence being sought. "It seems shockingly naive now," he says, "but in those days no one was particularly active in pursuing copyright in the home computer market. We had to pull it after around three weeks after a scary 'cease and desist' letter arrived." The short-lived conversion was released by Hanson's Superior Software, a company founded in 1982, that would eventually prove to be the most prolific software company on the



» The infamous Barbarian ad – featuring Page 3 stunner Maria Whittaker alongside none other than Wolf from Gladiators – was blasted from many quarters; appalled that such filth could find its way on to their newsagents shelves. The controversy served only to make Peter Scott's excellent conversion a huge hit on both the BBC and Electron.



» Geoff Crammond's cracking take on *Invaders* was followed in 1983 by the first clear sign of his future direction – *Aviator* was a good, though complicated flight simulator (many players had to consult Micro User's guide to the game just to work out how to take off), but Crammond's real gem came in the form of 1984's *Revs*, an outstanding Formula Three simulator.

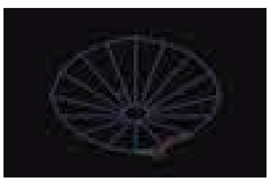


BBC MICRO





» Gremlin's *Starclash* was short-lived after obvious comparison's with *Elite*. In fact, legal action was threatened, and the game swiftly withdrawn from sale.



» Orlando's super-smooth take on *Tempest* – an incomplete demo – was a substantial improvement on the version which hit the stands on the Superior Software label.

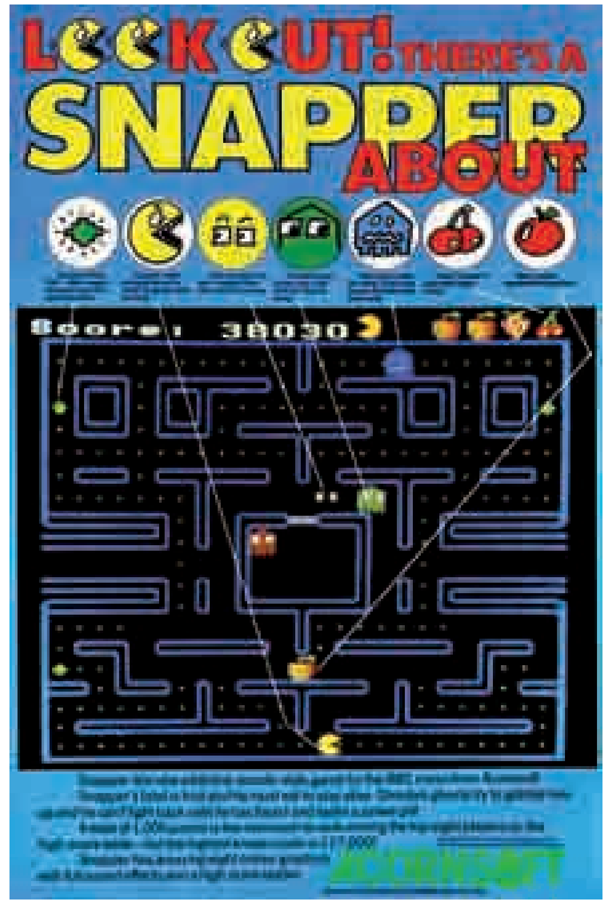


» Acornsoft was renowned for excellent arcade conversions, but the original version of this *Pac-Man* clone was so faithful to the original that Acornsoft was forced to withdraw it and tweak the graphics. This led to the addition of a cowboy hat and legs to the main character, and the ghosts switched for limbed monsters.

8-bit Acorn scene. Hanson was a programmer himself, and prior to starting his own label had written games for the Atom that were released by Leeds-based publisher Program Power (later became Micro Power) another major player in the BBC games market. During the early life of the BBC Micro, Acornsoft, Superior Software and Micro Power were the dominant players on the games scene.

The success of the BBC Micro was reflected in Acorn's profits, rising from £3,000 in 1979 to £8.6 million by July 1983. By that year, however, rivalry was intense in the home computer market, as Sinclair and Commodore had cultivated enormous games markets around their flagship machines. Sinclair's Spectrum 48K, in particular, was making enormous waves, and would, by mid-1983, be selling for under £130 (substantially less than the cost of the Model B). Acorn responded to the swiftly moving market by launching a cheaper sister machine to the BBC, in a move that would prove to be a seminal moment in the company's history.

The Acorn Electron launched in August 1983 at a price of £199, a timing and pricing that was a direct attempt to tap into the Christmas sales market. Curry would, once again, be locking horns with former employer, Sir Clive Sinclair. Substantially smaller than previous Acorn home computers, the Electron retained the 32K of the BBC Model B, but was slower and sacrificed much of the connectivity of its more expensive sibling. "I designed the case size out of a cardboard tissue box," says Wilson. "We didn't like what the first industrial designer came up with and needed a rebuttal." In spite of its cut-down nature, significant demand for the new model was courted by a high-profile advertising campaign, and everything appeared set up for Acorn to make inroads into Sinclair's share of the market.

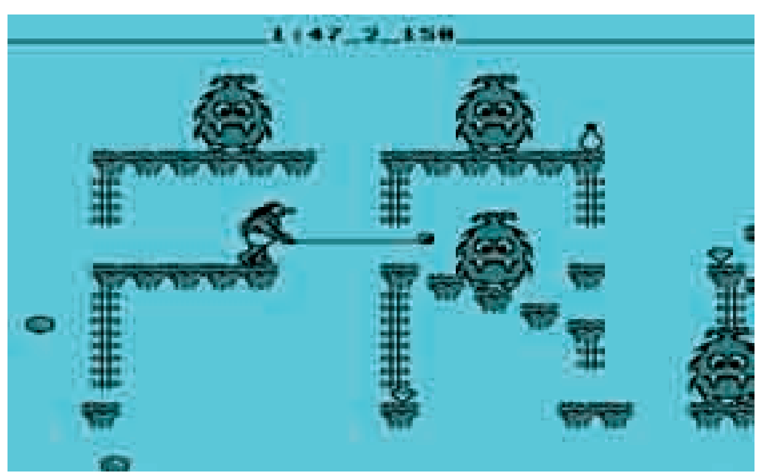


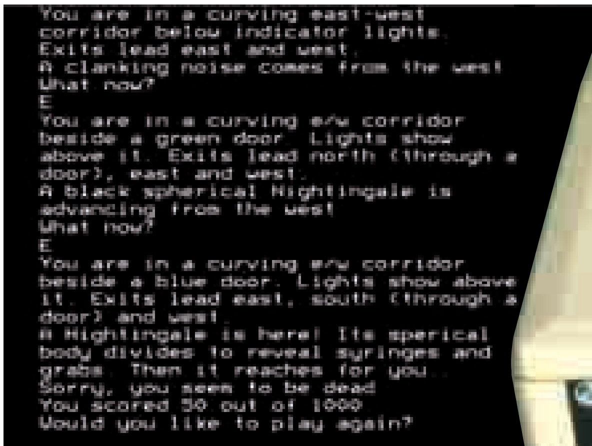
"The Christmas that wasn't" is how Wilson reflects on late 1983. Demand for the new model far outstripped supply (300,000 orders made, 30,000 machines delivered, according to one source), and the Electron's big chance to enter the market vanished as impatient parents opted for the readily available C64s and Spectrums as presents. Unfortunately for Acorn, by early 1984 the production problems were easing, but the original contracts drawn up with manufacturers were still being adhered to, meaning that the large numbers intended to be in shops for the previous Christmas were being delivered, but precious few customers were willing to buy them. An estimated quarter of a million Electrons were left unsold by the end of 1984, and the boom time of the previous few years was replaced with a time of great uncertainty at Acorn.

"The video hardware on the Electron was very poor compared to the BBC," says Braben. Indeed, the Electron suffered as the higher resolution screen modes slowed the machine considerably in comparison to its older sibling due to the way in which the machine handled its CPU cycles. Sound was also an obstacle, with the new model featuring only one-track audio compared to the three tracks for music alone enjoyed by the Beeb. "The Electron would slow

» Due to the Electron's speed problems in colourful high resolution screen modes, authors would often opt for quicker, two-colour modes, as seen here in *Frak!*. Other high-profile examples of this trade-off of speed for colour come in the Electron version of *Elite*.









» The text adventure scene was vibrant on both the BBC and Electron, with titles such as the Robico's *Enthar Seven*, Epic's *The Lost Crystal*, Shard's *Woodbury End* and Larsoft's Quill-penned adventures including *Nine Dancers*. A grisly end meets the adventurer here in *Snowball*, one of a string of outstanding releases by the Level 9 label.

down occasionally when you made a sound," recalls Peter Scott, a prolific programmer of titles such as *Thunderstruck, Omega Orb* and *Ransack*. "Only having a single sound channel meant that the audio sounded choppy," adds Sobell, "and any background music was muted for every beep or gurgle in your gameplay."

"The differences between the hardware meant getting a game that really pushed the limits on both machines without the need for totally rewriting it for each was impossible," continues Scott. "I rarely used the hi-res, memory-hungry graphics modes that slowed the Electron down to a crawl. That meant my games ran at almost the same speed on both machines." Johnson agrees: "Superior wanted me to do *Overdrive* on the Electron for quite a while. It was only when they said, 'Okay, you've got to do it now – we've printed the cassette inlays', that I actually went away and wrote it. It only took about a week and a half – it wasn't very difficult."

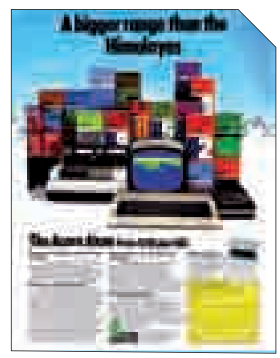
Ian Bell is perhaps the bluntest about the machine – "I never really liked it as a computer," while Wilson adds: "The Electron wasn't a success. It should have been a year earlier." However, the Electron was supported by several software publishers, and many games were marketed as "BBC/Electron" titles, with either one version of a game compatible with both machines, or one version on one side of a cassette, and the other on the reverse.

A bad year for Acorn was offset by a vintage year for BBC games, and 1984 saw the arrival of two titles on the Acornsoft label, which acted as showcases for programmers whose names, resonate not only across the Acorn 8-bit scene, but across gaming in general.

Geoff Crammond's association with the BBC began back in 1981 with *Super Invaders*, a super-smooth *Invaders* clone that is still immensely playable today. The first real clue to his future direction, however, came in 1983 with *Aviator*, a wireframe flight sim with an incredibly sophisticated physics-based engine. In 1984, it was followed by the stunning *Revs*, an outstanding Formula Three driving simulator that paved the way for Crammond's work on *Stunt Car Racer* and the *Grand Prix* series of games. *Revs* remained the outstanding racing title on the BBC throughout the computer's life, with only The Fourth Dimension's *E-Type* – released some six years later – as serious competition.

Bell and Braben's major contribution to the Acorn canon is one which reverberates far and wide today; there are few formats in the Eighties and Nineties that weren't graced with a version of the classic space trading game, *Elite*, a game which debuted on the 8-bit Acorn. "A lot of the games at the time were games made for a quick buzz, whereas *Elite* had a depth that meant the player was rewarded for their investment in playing the game," recalls Johnson.

> "RIVALRY WAS INTENSE IN THE HOME COMPUTER MARKET, AS SINCLAIR AND COMMODORE HAD CULTIVATED HUGE GAMES MARKETS AROUND THEIR FLAGSHIP MACHINES"



» The choice that the Acorn Atom offered was heavily marketed at consumers.

OTHER VERSIONS - WHEN ONE MACHINE ISN'T ENOUGH...

Acorn Atom

Acorn's first home computer, sold for £120 in kit form, or £170 fully assembled. The entry-level model had 2KB of RAM and 8KB of ROM. Generally considered a successful entry into the market, the machine had built-in Atom BASIC, but was criticised by Acorn's own technicians due to the MC6847 video chip it ran, which was NTSC-only.



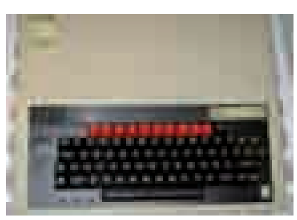
Acorn Electron

Cut-down version of the BBC Model B, launched at £199 and aimed to impact on the Spectrum-dominated sub-£200 market. 'The Elk' was restricted to just one channel sound, and offered less connectivity than the BBC. Official upgrades, the Plus 1 and Plus 3, were released which gave the Electron more expansion ports.



BBC B+

An expanded BBC B featuring either 64KB or 128KB RAM, with prices starting at £499. Almost identical to the BBC B in looks, except for a keystrip detailing the amount of RAM on board. The machines featured 32K standard memory, and the remainder was split between sideways (video) and shadow (extended) RAM.



BBC Master, Master Turbo, Master 512 and Master Compact

The final 8-bit Acorn machines, which ran on the streamlined 65C02 processor. The Master Turbo and 512 models shipped with second processors, but were otherwise identical to the basic Master. The Master Compact was fundamentally the same machine, but redesigned.



Collectibles

A short-lived series of Business Computers was launched in 1984, all based around the B+, while a modified Electron linked to a speech synthesizer and a modem known as the British Telecom M2105 also surfaced. After the Olivetti takeover, BBC Masters were rebadged under the Olivetti name as the Prodest PC 128 S for the Italian market.



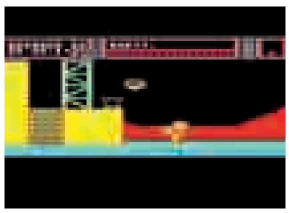
BBC MICRO

THE BBC HOMEBREW SCENE

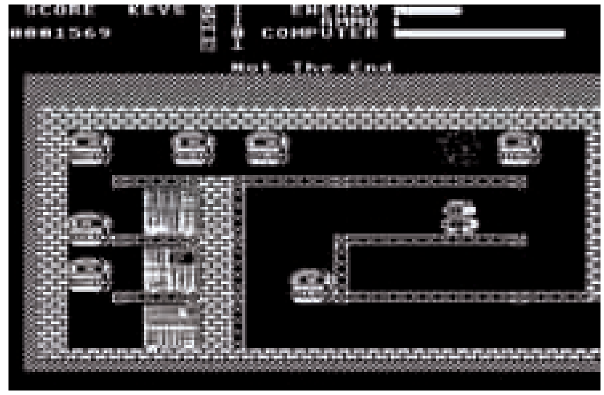
The homebrew scene surrounding the BBC and Electron has always been strong, thanks to type-in games in the likes of *Electron User*, the pick of which, found their way on to budget label Alternative's *Triple Decker* series. Since the death throes of the commercial games market for the Acorn machines, however, a small but determined group of fans have kept the flame alive. Recent commercially released titles such as Cronosoft's platformer *Egghead In Space*, and *Weenies*, a storming *Lemmings*-like puzzler, are well worth a look.

The best sources of material, currently, are to be found in the form of BBC PD and EUG (Electron Users Group). The pair has, over time, accumulated a quite astonishing array of utilities, artwork, musical compositions, demos, and a substantial number of full-blown games. Standout titles include Peter Hatton's *Moonbase Beta*, an excellent platformer with a similar feel to Peter Scott's *Spycat*, and Lars Osterballe's collections of work, which take in impressive demos as well as games including shooter *Pantheon*. There are plenty of offbeat delights to be found too, such as *Argument Sketch* (a port of a subgame which features in the Amiga title *Monty Python's Flying Circus*) and *You're Alan Partridge*, a quiz show for the Electron that supports Millsgrade Ltd's little-known Voxbox speech synthesizer for the machine.









» This quality monochrome shooter was a fine budget title on the Bug Byte label, also home to such £1.99 classics as *Savage Pond*, *Hunkidory* and the four-player *Dunjunz*.

"It created a real buzz everywhere," adds Scott. "People with other machines were, for the first time, jealous of BBC owners."

Like the best arcade games, *Elite* has not been short of imitators over the years, but one BBC title, *Gremlin's Star Clash*, written by Julian Bushell, met with gaping jaws upon release, such were the similarities. "It did look a little like plagiarism to me," says Braben. "I even saw a bug in it that I knew to be in *Elite*." With legal action on the cards, the game was swiftly withdrawn from sale.

Also in 1984 came *Frak!*, a ladders and levels game based around a caveman armed with a yo-yo from the pen of Orlando (aka Nick Pelling). While a great game, Pelling's finest moment for the Beeb would come three years later in the form of the awesome *Firetrack*, one of the outstanding 8-bit shoot-'em-ups on any platform. "We'd all await the latest game from Orlando with bated breath," says Scott. "That was the last really amazing technical achievement on the Beeb in my view, with beautiful scrolling and great gameplay." Other Pelling creations included the earlier shooter *Zalaga*, a fantastic port of *Galaga*, as well as another technical wonder, *3D Pool*, a title arriving late in the BBC's life. Most intriguingly, and a genuine rarity only recently unearthed, is a super-smooth development version of *Tempest* from 1986.

In spite of the problems at Acorn, development continued, and hard on the heels of the Electron came the BBC B+, which arrived in 64K and 128K incarnations. While the extra memory offered a clear improvement on the 32K machines, the new models suffered due to compatibility issues with some BBC B games, and a general lack of support. "Nobody really cared about the BBC B+," says Sobell. "There were thousands of BBC Bs out there, nobody was going to release a game that didn't run on that platform. I never really understood why the B+ was released." Never really anything more than a stopgap, the B+ did nothing to halt Acorn's financial woes, which reached crisis point in February 1985.

After fears that Acorn would be wound up altogether, Olivetti acquired a controlling share, and in early 1986, yet another BBC hit the shelves. A clear improvement on its predecessors, the BBC Master Series came with a minimum 128K, and although late onto a scene that was already graced by the 16-bit Atari ST and Amiga computers, the new model consolidated Acorn's position in the educational computing market. Later in the year came the Master Compact, as well as the Master Turbo and Master 512 (both of which shipped with second processors already installed). Few software houses supported the machines, although Superior Software did offer enhanced Master-compatible versions of some of its releases, including the highly acclaimed Master-only version of Elite. These machines would be the last major 8-bit computers Acorn produced.

Following the launch of the Master series of machines, a long-running Acorn development project entitled ARM was soon to reach completion, resulting in the 32-bit Archimedes range. Acorn would continue to produce computers until the late-Nineties, and the Acorn brand was also revived in 2006, offering a range of notebook PCs.

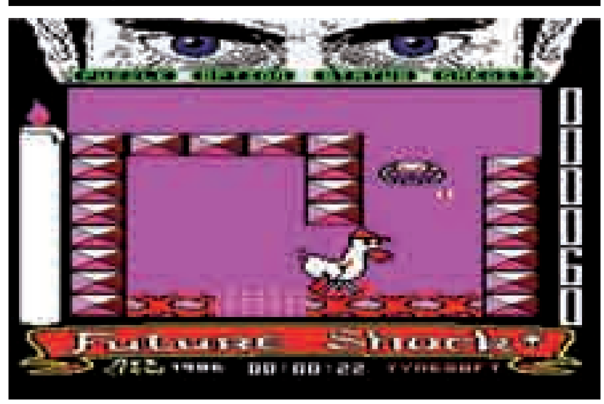
Throughout the turmoil Acorn was facing, the games scene on the BBC and Electron was thriving. 1985 saw the birth of Superior Software's long-running *Repton* series of games, which would eventually yield its own powerful programming language, Reptol, released as part of the *Repton Infinity* package. "The *Repton* series of games has been Superior's biggest success story, selling over 125,000 copies in total," says Hanson. Other key Superior releases included Johnson's *Deathstar*, an excellent port of *Sinistar*, and *Barbarian*, one of many conversions Scott coded for the label, as well as the likes of *Thrust*, *Stryker's Run* (and its sequel *Codename:*



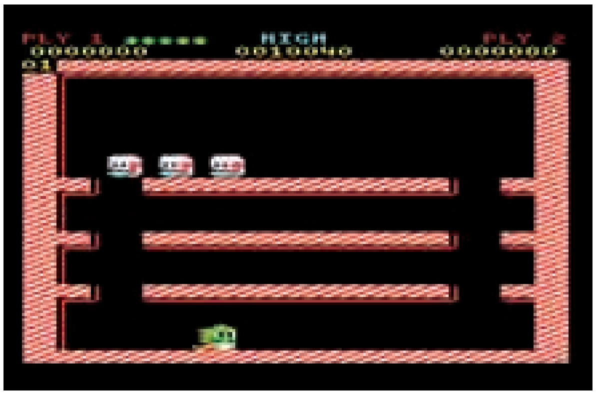


» Electron owners found themselves disappointed after buying this reissue of Ultimate's classic. As with the original release, the game was incompatible with the machine, and the cassette in fact contained the BBC version on both sides.





» Tynesoft's slick-looking *Ian Botham's Test Match* cricket game met with frustration from Electron users, after a coding mistake meant it was impossible to hit the ball. Programmed on a BBC, it made use of a memory location that didn't exist on the cut-down machine, and without adequate playtesting on the Electron, around 4,000 copies ended up being returned. *Future Shock* featured guest appearances from characters that had appeared in previous Tynesoft titles, including the duck from *Ian Botham*, as well as Raj, star of *Vindaloo*.



» An unreleased conversion of *Bubble Bobble*, by Peter Gillett. Originally slated to be a 1989 release on the Firebird label, the slowing software market on the BBC made licences from other platforms that were less attractive to software houses.



» *Buffalo Bill's Rodeo Games*, a great example of the quality multi-event style games which Tynesoft was renowned for.

Droid) and *Ravenskull*. In 1986, Superior bought the rights to Acornsoft's back catalogue, and lavish re-releases of classic titles such as *Elite* soon followed. One of the most acclaimed BBC and Electron titles, Peter Irvin and Jeremy Smith's enormous space arcade adventure, *Exile*, was another Superior release. The game was another great success for the label and is often held up alongside *Elite* as the pinnacle of 8-bit Acorn gaming.

With Superior's rise to prominence came its long-term rival Micro Power's fall from grace. The label had a string of excellent titles to its name, with fine ports of *Qix* (*Frenzy*), *Mr Do!* (the outstanding *Mr Ee!*) and *Donkey Kong* (*Killer Gorilla*). Micro Power's defining moment came with Michael St Aubyn's puzzle-based platformer *Imogen*. Unfortunately, ambition got the better of the publisher in the form of Gary Partis's *Doctor Who And The Mines Of Terror*.

The final words on the mainstream BBC and Electron software scene rest back with Superior Software, though, whose unwavering support of the market continued well into the Nineties, long after most had either folded or moved on to more powerful platforms. Scott's miraculous conversion of *Sim City* is a highlight, topping off a period where he was rightly dubbed 'the conversion king', in reference to quality conversions of offbeat games such as *Hostages* and *Ballistix*. Superior's *Play It Again Sam* series of compilations had begun with repackages of its own titles, but would soon take in games from a whole host of publishers including Aardvark (Orlando's *Zalaga*), Tynesoft (*Winter Olympiad 88*) and Electric Dreams (Firetrack). "We asked other software companies



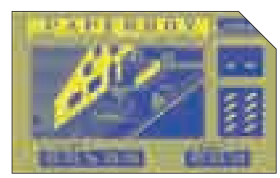
» An early ad campaign from Micro Power.

"IN 1985, THE GAMES SCENE ON THE BBC AND ELECTRON WAS THRIVING, ESPECIALLY WITH THE BIRTH OF SUPERIOR SOFTWARE'S LONG-RUNNING REPTON SERIES OF GAMES"

An enormous arcade adventure, it utilised a special ROM chip, the production of which contributed to the company's financial problems, which eventually caused them to fold.

Following Micro Power's demise, Newcastle-based label Tynesoft came to prominence. Multi-event games such as *Commonwealth Games, Indoor Sports* and *Circus Games* all sold well, while original titles such as Jason Sobell and Kevin Blake's platformer *Future Shock* displayed a programming flair as good as anything on the scene at the time. The Tynesoft story ended abruptly when a sister company ran into financial trouble and took the software house down with it. The final blow, however, was an arson attack that destroyed the company's offices. "My immediate thought was 'how convenient'," recalls Sobell. "I believe they found that someone had poured some flammable substance into the drains then set it alight, and that all records, contracts and financial details were destroyed…"

whether they would like some of their games to be included on the compilations," recalls Hanson, "and almost all of them were keen on the idea". In addition, previously unreleased titles such as *Arkanoid* clone *Hyperball* and platform puzzler *Qwak* started to appear. "They were games that we felt deserved to be released," adds Hanson, "but possibly weren't strong enough to warrant individual release." Superior Software later became Superior Interactive, and today produces PC versions of such BBC classics as *Repton, Galaforce* and *Ravenskull*, with more on the way, including *Stryker's Run* and *Quest*. The BBC may well be dead, but its spirit definitely lives on.



» As well as a raft of excellent conversions, the BBC and Electron were also home to big-selling disappointments such as this two-colour take on the Atari classic.



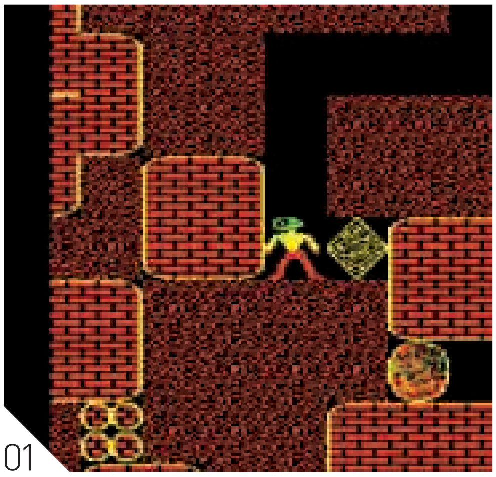
» *Cute To Kill* – one of the best shooters to be released on the Beeb – was a little-heralded title on the Mandarin label.



BBC COMPUTER

PERFECT TEN GAMES

It may have sat proudly in schools around the country, but Acorn's BBC wasn't just an edutainment machine. There were plenty of amazing games available for it, as the following two pages prove



01

REPTON

» **RELEASED:** 1985

» **PUBLISHED BY:** SUPERIOR SOFTWARE

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** STRYKER'S RUN

01 ***Repton* was a brilliant take on *Boulder Dash* (although, it's far too methodical to be considered a true clone) that still remains as fresh as a day old daisy.** All the more impressive when you consider that it was put together by a 15-year-old coder. It's amazing to think that the classic *Repton* is now a staggering 22 years old. It seems like only yesterday that we were taking the mickey out of Chris Talbot because his parents had bought him a computer that the rest of us only used at school, while we all played on our Spectrums, CPCs and C64s. Still, Chris had the last laugh, as Repton was a great little puzzle game ideally suited to the BBC. It also proved rather popular, selling 125,000 copies between 1985 and 1990.

GRANNY'S GARDEN

» **RELEASED:** 1983

» **PUBLISHED BY:** 4MATION

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** FLOWERS OF CRYSTAL

02 **It may have been seen as a simple educational title, designed to help children become accustomed to using computers. However, in retrospect, *Granny's Garden* was so much more than that.** "Ha ha! Now I've got you! I will send you home at once." If you've never heard the previous chilling phrase, then you've obviously never experienced the terrors of *Granny's Garden*. Yes, the abrupt endings to your journey are as frustrating now as they were back in 1983. And those annoying dragons are still the bane of your life, but no other education title on the Beeb has been able to pair learning and fun so successfully. An utterly charming adventure gaming experience.



02

IMOGEN

» **RELEASED:** 1986

» **DEVELOPED BY:** MICRO POWER

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** KILLER GORILLA

03 ***Imogen* is easily one of the BBC's most ambitious games, along with *Elite*, *Citadel* and *Exile*. It proved that 8-bit titles could have massive amounts of depth.** Although it starts off looking like just another simple platformer, you soon discover that *Imogen* is littered with ingenious game design and extremely clever puzzles. You are rewarded with immense satisfaction once you've finally worked them out too. A simple icon system was also in place to handle specific tasks such as talking. While your wizard's ability to change into two distinct forms, a cat and a monkey, enhanced the clever puzzles no end and continually opened up the immense game world.

CYLON ATTACK

» **RELEASED:** 1983

» **PUBLISHED BY:** A&F SOFTWARE

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** CHUCKIE EGG

04 **Few space shooters on the BBC (and there are plenty) match the majesty of this offering from A&F Software.** *Cylon Attack* required you to fly through space shooting down a set number of aliens (which looked suspiciously like some of the spaceships from *Battlestar Galactica*). Initially, docking at the end of each stage to refuel was sufficient. However, later levels would become so intense that extra trips to the filling station were required in order to withstand the vicious onslaught. Unfortunately it lacks the huge level of depth that's found in *Elite*, but if you're all about the blasting, then *Cylon Attack* offers a far more suitable alternative.

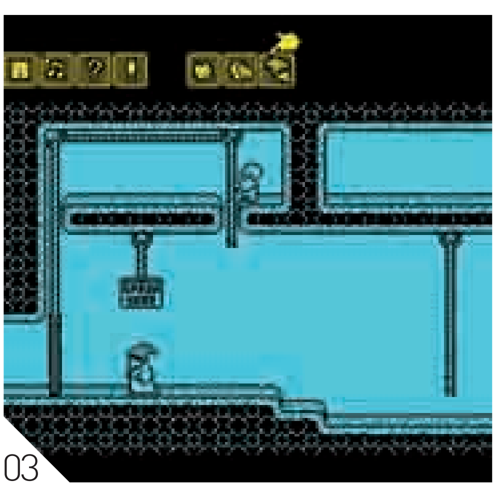
MR EE

» **RELEASED:** 1984

» **PUBLISHED BY:** MICRO POWER

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** ADVENTURE

05 **There have been countless conversions of the classic *Mr Do!* on a variety of systems ranging from the SNES to the Neo Geo. But hardly any of them have managed to capture the magic of the original arcade game.** Amazingly though, Adrian Stephens did it successfully when he created *Mr Ee*. His clone is a scarily accurate version of Universal's original. Armed with no more than a power ball, Mr Do!, sorry, Mr Ee must scuttle around the mazes either collecting a set amount of cherries or killing all the monsters, to continue. It's not arcade perfect, but it's arguably the greatest conversion of the game that's available.



03

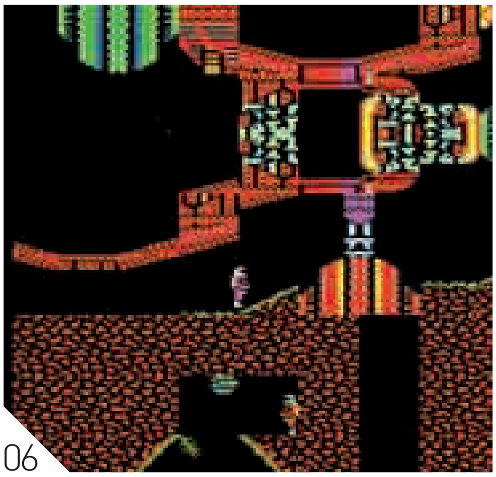


04



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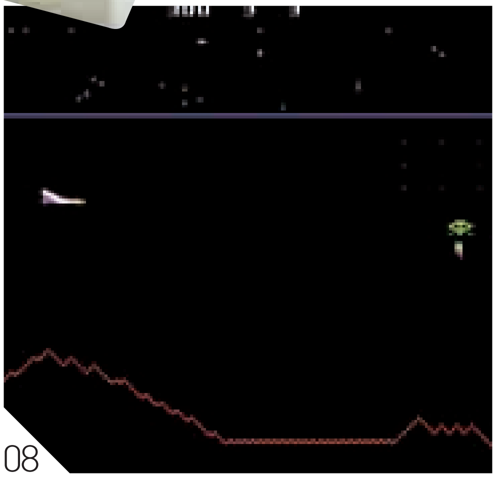




06



07



08

EXILE

» **RELEASED:** 1988

» **PUBLISHED BY:** SUPERIOR SOFTWARE

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** CODENAME: DROID

06 **When we consider the amount of scorn that the BBC receives on our very own forum, it makes us wonder if the haters have ever actually played on one outside of school**. Even the briefest play of *Exile* is enough to know that it's something very special. And as your spaceman infiltrates the planet Phoebus, it continues to impress, mainly due to its superb physics, massive game world and clever game mechanics. With its beautiful looking visuals, masterful use of sound and those aforementioned physics, *Exile* is quite possibly one of the most complex adventures that the BBC ever received. A true classic.

CITADEL

» **RELEASED:** 1985

» **PUBLISHED BY:** SUPERIOR SOFTWARE

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** PALACE OF MAGIC

07 **Similar to *Imogen, Citadel* proves that first looks can definitely be deceiving. Again, it is a title that appears to be nothing more than a simple platformer.** While there are plenty of platforms and objects to jump on and over, *Citadel* is actually a sprawling (it's over 100 screens in size) graphical adventure. Featuring plenty of devious puzzles that require a fair amount of head scratching in order to solve them, it'll certainly keep you intrigued. With its bold, bright visuals, pre-game digitised speech and the opportunity to play as either a girl or boy, *Citadel* stands proudly apart from its BBC peers and remains one of the machine's greatest moments.

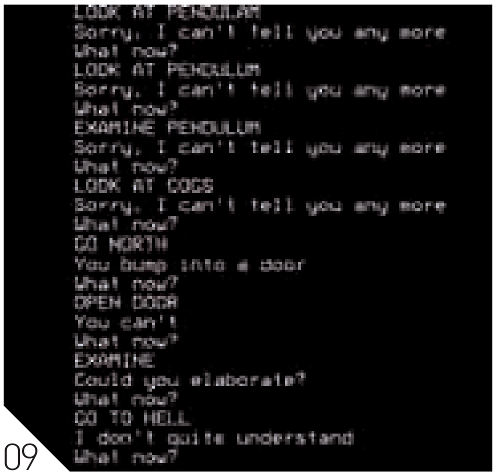
PLANETOID

» **RELEASED:** 1982

» **PUBLISHED BY:** ACORNSOFT

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** SNAPPER

08 **Another great clone. If you're unable to tell by looking at the accompanying screenshot (why are you even reading this mag?) *Planetoid* was Acornsoft's answer to Eugene Jarvis's *Defender*, and pretty good it was too.** Faster than an amphetamine-fuelled cheetah, *Planetoid* was an intense conversion that looked the business and boasted the gameplay to match. It was Acornsoft's second arcade conversion and instantly proved a hit thanks to those fast moving visuals and its challenging gameplay. It was originally called *Defender* but the name was dropped due to legal reasons, thankfully the same thing didn't happen to the actual game…



09

LORDS OF TIME

» **RELEASED:** 1983

» **PUBLISHED BY:** LEVEL 9

» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** DUNGEON ADVENTURE

09 **There are a large number of brilliant text adventures on the BBC, but this is arguably one of the best.** It features a band of evil time lords (no relation to Doctor Who) who are doing their best to alter and change history, so Father Time has asked you to stop them. Set across a variety of different time periods, *Lords Of Time* is a compelling adventure game that will cause your brain to go into overload, as you try to follow the constantly twisting plot and solve its intricately designed puzzles. With its well-written story, clever parser and crafty puzzles, *Lords Of Time* is a wonderful example, proving that you don't need elaborate visuals to tell an entertaining story. If you do plan on picking it up then make sure that you track down Level 9's *Time and Magik* compilation as it also features *Red Moon* and *The Price of Magik*.

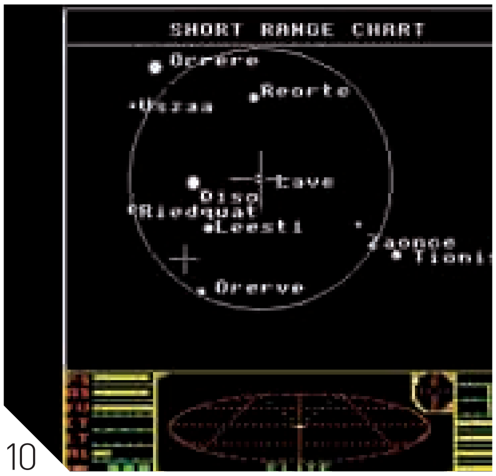
ELITE

» **RELEASED:** 1984

» **PUBLISHED BY:** ACORNSOFT

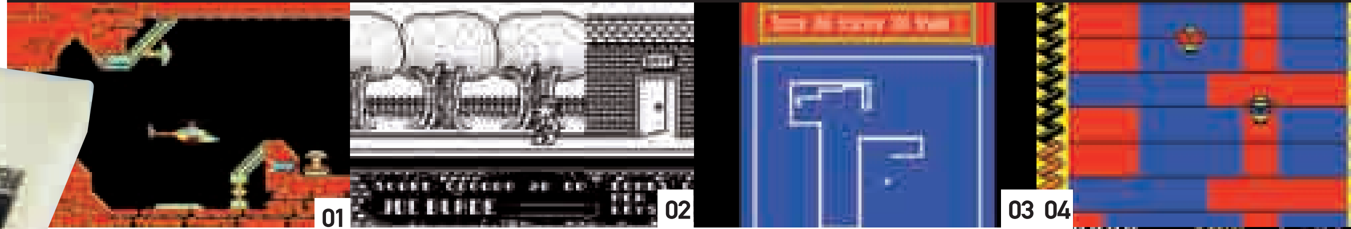
» **BY THE SAME PUBLISHER:** LABYRINTH

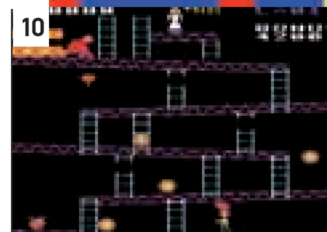
10 **Oh come on, did you really think we'd do a BBC top ten and not include the mighty Elite? We'd have been hung up and lynched by BBC owners everywhere.** Created by David Braben and Ian Bell, (at the time, two undergraduates from Jesus Collage in Cambridge), Elite is still seen by many as the definitive space trading game, a title it arguably deserves. Braben and Bell's game is absolutely huge in scope and its open-ended gameplay and advanced looking visuals soon meant that it was ported to a staggering variety of home systems and consoles. Even now home-brew updates continue to get made, and Braben is insistant that an Elite IV is definately on the way. Until that actually happens though, you'll just have to make do with one of the greatest games to ever appear on Acorn's humble machine.



10

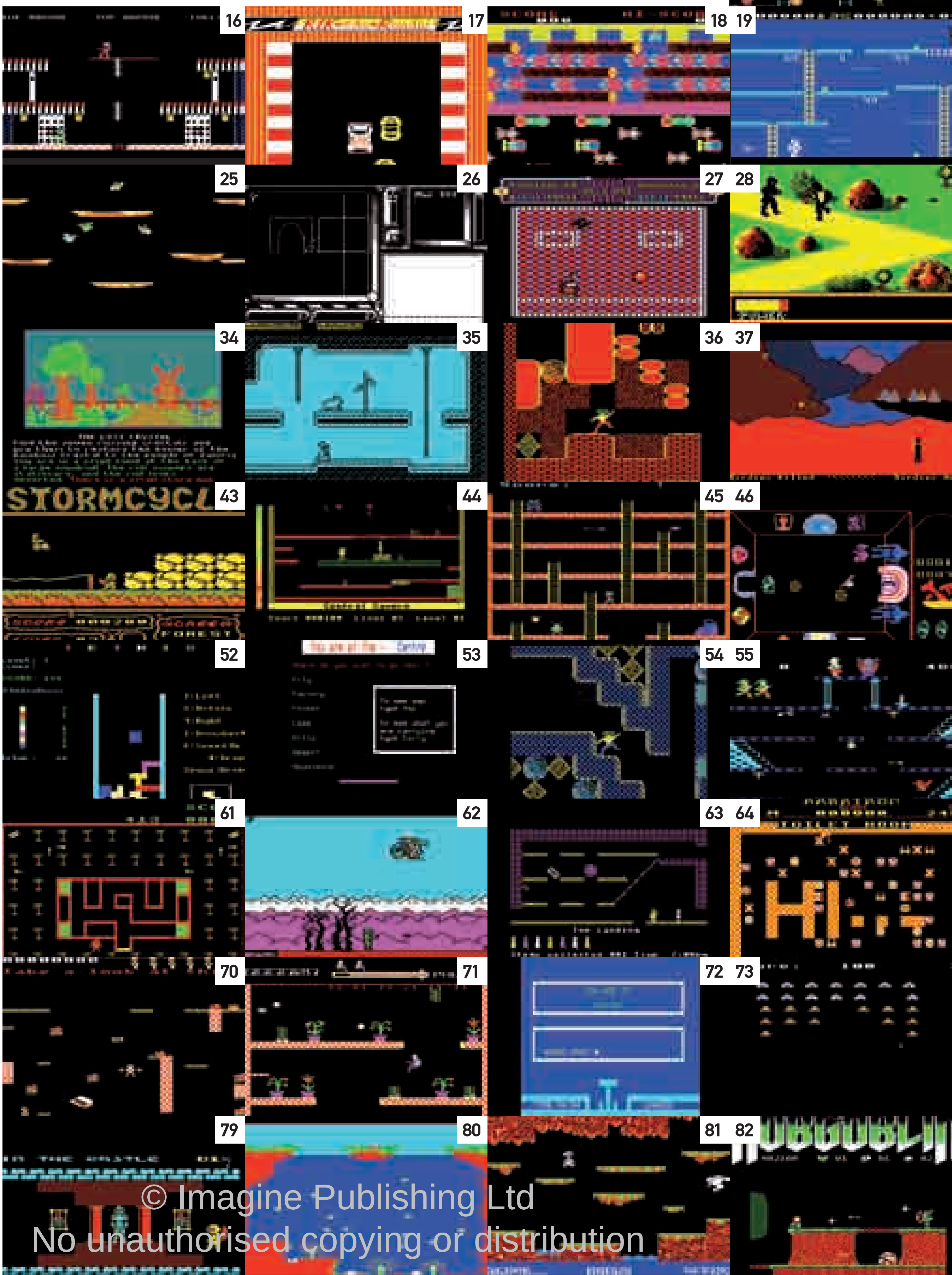




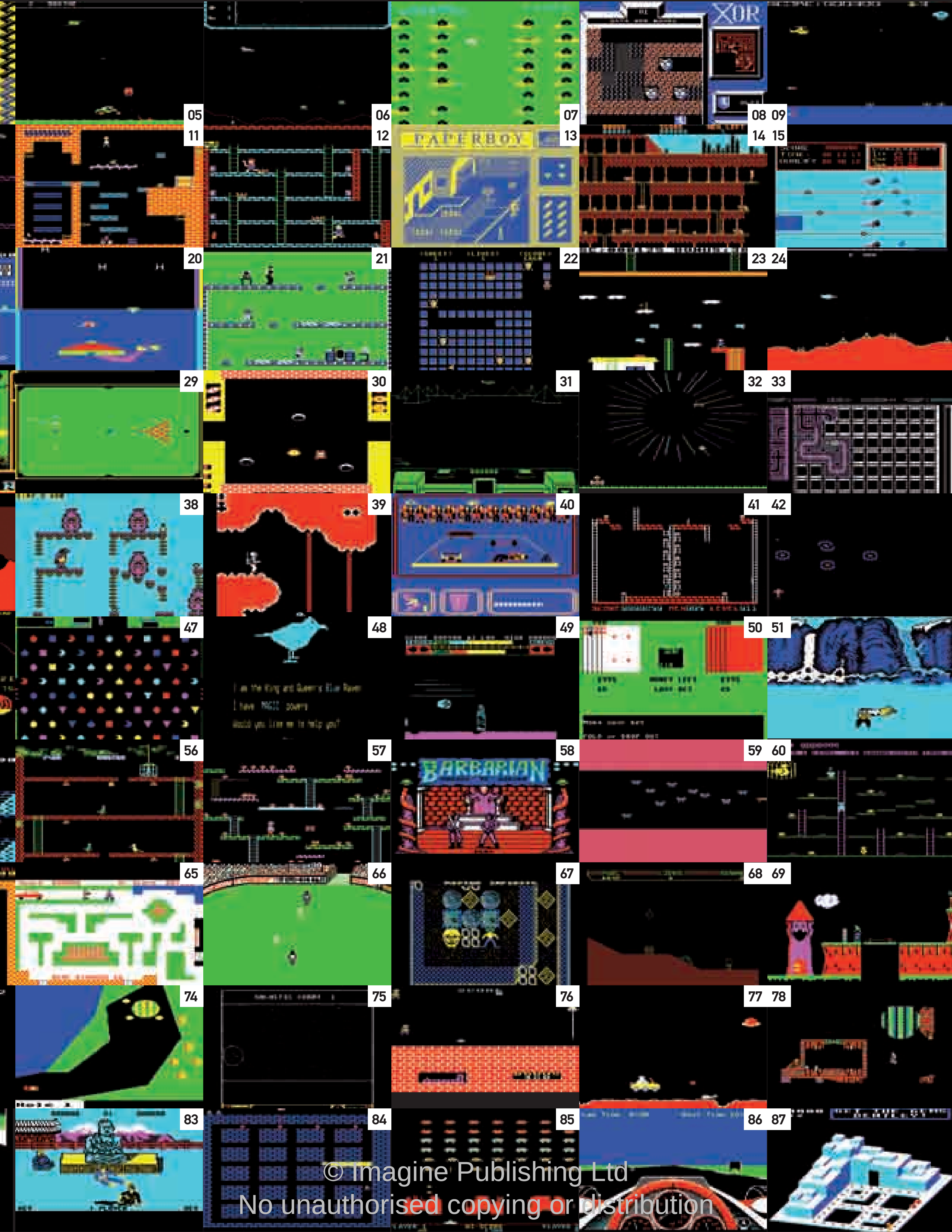


ACORN BBC
and the rest...

It may have been seen as little more than an 'educational computer', but with over a thousand releases, there was plenty to play on your BBC when school was finally over. If you need further proof then simply take a look over these two pages



01 AIRWOLF
02 JOE BLADE
03 SNAKE
04 HARVEY HEADBANGER
05 BMX ON THE MOON
06 GAUNTLET
07 MOLE
08 XOR
09 COPTER CAPERS
10 KILLER GORILLA
11 BLAGGER
12 FIREBUG
13 PAPERBOY
14 STAIRWAY TO HELL
15 HYPER SPORTS
16 BRUCE LEE
17 RIK THE ROADIE
18 FROGGER
19 MR FREEZE
20 STRATOBOMBER
21 IMPOSSIBLE MISSION
22 DANGER UXB
23 JACK AND THE BEANSTALK
24 SCRAMBLE
25 JOUST
26 CHOLO
27 HELTER SKELTER
28 THE LAST NINJA
29 SNOOKER
30 MR WIMPY
31 3D TANKZONE
32 GORF
33 PIPEMANIA
34 THE LOST CRYSTAL
35 IMOGEN
36 REPTON
37 KANE
38 FRAK!
39 CODENAME: DROID
40 GEOFF CAPES STRONG MAN
41 LODE RUNNER
42 MOON CRESTA
43 STORM CYCLE
44 MANIC MINER
45 FELIX IN THE FACTORY
46 ATIC ATAC
47 DROGNA
48 GRANNY'S GARDEN
49 LUNAR JETMAN
50 SAMANTHA FOX STRIP POKER
51 YIE AR KUNG FU
52 TETRIS
53 FLOWERS OF CRYSTAL
54 REPTON 3
55 SORCERY
56 WALLABY
57 MAGIC MUSHROOMS
58 BARBARIAN
59 BORIS IN THE UNDERWORLD
60 CHUCKIE EGG
61 MONKEY NUTS
62 STRYKER'S RUN
63 JET SET WILLY
64 AABATRON
65 COPS 'N ROBBERS
66 IAN BOTHAM'S TEST MATCH
67 REPTON INFINITY
68 THRUST
69 WIZADORE
70 FAT MAN SAM
71 MICROCOSM
72 TREASURE HUNT
73 SPACE HAWKS
74 BIRDIE BARRAGE
75 ELITE
76 HUNCHBACK
77 SPACEMAN SID
78 EXILE
79 THUNDERSTRUCK
80 SAVAGE POND
81 CREEPY CAVE
82 HOBGOBLIN
83 THE WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST
84 ROCKY
85 ELECTRON INVADERS
86 REVS
87 CRYSTAL CASTLES


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XOR
PAPERBOY
I am the King and Queen's Blue Raven
I have MAGIC powers
Would you like me to help you?
BARBARIAN

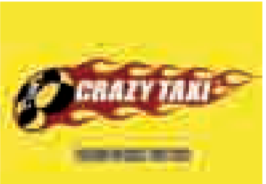
THE MAKING OF…
CRAZY TAXI

When Crazy Taxi hit arcades back in 1999, it left its oily skid marks all over their sticky carpets. Creating an insurgence of teary-eyed, lovelorn arcade cabs, the A to B driving arcade smash certainly shook things up on its release. Stuart Hunt hops in a metaphorical taxi with the game's creator, Kenji Kanno. So what are you waiting for? Jump in, the meter's running…





IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** SEGA

» **DEVELOPER:** HITMAKER

» **RELEASED:** 1999

» **GENRE:** RACING

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** A LOT, SAVE A BUNDLE AND BUY A DREAMCAST

» "Stop at the mark, not on the church!'



How many times have you been stuck in traffic on a piping hot day? The air-con has passed out from heat exhaustion, the radio bleats out monotonous mumblings about money saving late holiday deals and your bladder has picked an impromptu moment to register a cup of coffee you drank earlier that morning. Taking a sly glance out of your window to remedy your boredom, you notice a tempting mirage of empty lanes lying invitingly on the other side of the dual carriageway. The thought of putting your foot down, humping that central reservation and finally making some headway naughtily enters your subconscious. However, there it enters and there it remains, until the seemingly endless stream of cars ahead of you finally quit rubbernecking a feather-touch headlight prang and allow you to get home from work.

Living in the *Crazi Taxi* universe – where laws state that ferrying someone to KFC for cash will grant you a double-0 licence to drive wherever and however you like – is surely the stuff of dreams. But pull up those hand breaks; if this were the *Crazy Taxi* universe then I would suspect many of us would be supping our food through a straw, and I would be scratching my head at this point, pondering how to finish this paragraph without the help of this wonderful irony: it was this stuffy state of affairs that would provide the genesis of Sega's prolific taxicab cab.

"The inspiration behind *Crazy Taxi* came to me when I was stuck in traffic one day. I noticed a quiet lane on the opposite side of the road and thought how cool it would be to drive onto it and fly down the road. I was sure that there were many people sitting in their cars who would have agreed with me," muses Kenji Kanno, the creative director of the franchise.

With Kenji's seed of a concept beginning to take shape, and a team of 12 people assigned to the project, he began developing his idea under his AM3 department's new moniker, Hitmaker. He explains that the first hurdle that his team faced was deciding how best to transform his concept into a theme that would lend itself well to an arcade game. While hindsight merrily sings Kenji's praises for his decision to make a taxi-themed arcade racer, it was a direction that was initially met with concern by some members of his development team.

"It was very difficult for us to draw a consensus on making a game out of the 'taxi' theme. Some of the team were worried that the concept wouldn't be cool enough to polarise an arcade game around," he remembers.

Thankfully persistence prevailed and the idea entered production. After 18 months of development *Crazy Taxi* was finally completed, and when it eventually parked up beside the arcade machines of 1999 it exposed a famine of originality among its peers. A large number of stale looking machines were being churned out – predominantly gun and racing titles – which relied on high-resolution aesthetics and quirky cabinets to hide



» Thelma and Louise went for a bite to eat before driving off a cliff.



» "That's right, a trip down the road's gonna cost you 5,000 bucks."

their tired formulas. *Crazy Taxi*'s arrival brought a much-needed breath of fresh air through arcade doors and with it another irony.

Kenji candidly draws my attention to the fact that the game harks back to the classic score-chasing days of arcade gaming. There are no stages to work through and no contesting taxi firms to out fare; it's simply a race to earn as many points as possible before a depleting timer runs out.

Another factor, which would enforce its retro roots was that a single credit could offer almost an hour of play time to a skilled driver. By learning the routes and strategically picking your fares, it was possible to amass scores that would easily eclipse the bottom end of the 'Super License' benchmark. In fact, the Twin Galaxies Intergalactic scoreboard lists the game's highest score at an astonishing $106,184.94, an exhausting feat that was achieved by the nimble fingers of Florida's Jean-Claude Padilla.

Trying to attain exactly what it was that made the game feel so refreshing, when playing it through retrospective rear-view mirrors, will pain the brain cells. It wasn't screeching its tyres against new ground; it wasn't even taking a dramatic leap visually. It was simply an old style arcade game delivered in an original way.

However you looked at it, one thing would remain clear: few would forget the first time they caught sight of its cab. Its dazzling deep-yellow hue could light up even the most desolate and dankest of arcade corners. Its simple yet tactile frame – housing that fantastically loose steering wheel, mousemat seat cushion and rudimentary, *Chase HQ* gear stick – was arcade minimalism at its loudest. The game's graphics perfectly suited its look, and its Americana-style setting framed its beautifully sun-drenched city, colourful array of squeaky-voiced inhabitants and pristine fleet of glistening taxi cabs perfectly. Every iota of *Crazy Taxi* was carefully considered, even down to the weather, admits Kenji. "I wanted people to enjoy playing it, so the in-game weather is extremely bright. We really wanted it to complement the refreshing style of the game,"

This fresh vibrant look was a result of Sega's biggest leap in the amalgamation

"THE INSPIRATION BEHIND CRAZY TAXI CAME TO ME WHEN I WAS STUCK IN TRAFFIC ONE DAY. I NOTICED A QUIET LANE ON THE OPPOSITE SIDE OF THE ROAD AND THOUGHT HOW COOL IT WOULD BE TO DRIVE ONTO IT" KENJI KANNO ON HOW HE CAME UP WITH THE IDEA FOR CRAZY TAXI

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

AFTER BURNER II
SYSTEM: ARCADE
YEAR: 1987

FIGHTING VIPERS
SYSTEMS: ARCADE, SATURN
YEAR: 1995

SHENMUE
SYSTEM: DREAMCAST
YEAR: 1999



» Axel was trying to impress the ladies with the infinity pool he just had fitted.



» Sparks fly as Axel puts his foot down into heavy traffic.



CRAZY TAXI

CRAZY BOX OUT

The Crazy Box mode, introduced on the Dreamcast port, allowed gamers to hone their taxiing skills for the main game. This added extra was popular among fans of the game. It offered experts the chance to improve their skills, while offering novices the chance to learn and practise the 'cab stunts'. "I wanted to include some tutorial content for its Dreamcast release, but not be pushy with it. I was really happy with the game's play cycle. You could become better in the main mode by playing the mini-games – new situations could be unlocked by playing the main game – this would draw you back to the Crazy Box mode." Kenji then adds: "I liked playing all the Crazy Box missions. To stretch a point, I guess I did enjoy Crazy Zig-Zag 2 the most. I felt it best maximized the players sense of mastery to feel like, 'Wow, I'm a genius!'"

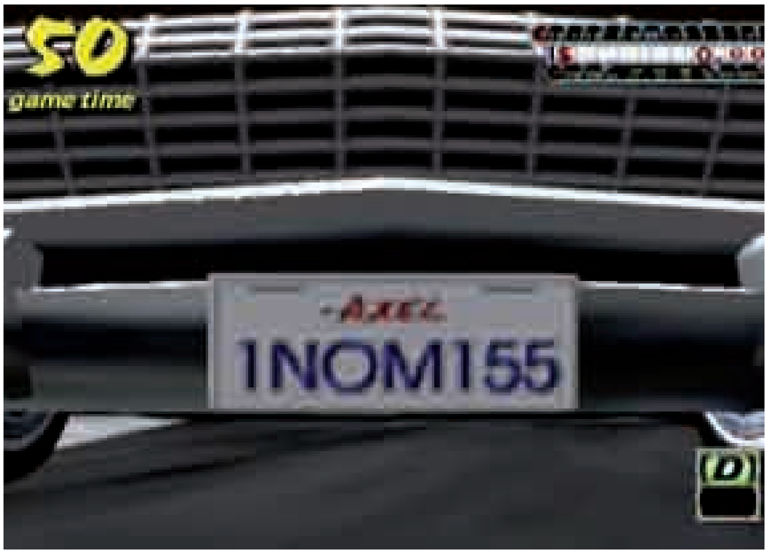


of its arcade and console markets: The NAOMI board. This acronym for New Arcade Operation Machine Idea may have shared body parts with the Dreamcast (both used the same Hitachi SH-4 CPU, digital processing technology and AKA Yamaha sound system), but differences could be drawn between the two siblings. The NAOMI boards were capable of cramming twice as many graphics, and up to four times the amount of sound memory than the noble Dreamcast. And by 'stacking' NAOMIs it was possible to improve their performance even further. While the idea of stacking two Dreamcasts together might appease Mega CD enthusiasts, however, it unfortunately proves ineffective in accelerating the look and speed of its games.

Released in 1999 – the same year that the Dreamcast landed on UK shelves – *Crazy Taxi* paved the way for a glut of iconic arcade games that would later be ported, practically unsullied, onto the machine. This would further fuel the criticism that the tactile-looking NAOMI cabs were just simply 'Dreamcasts in taller boxes'.

Merging both markets proved a long and tortuous taxi ride for Sega, leaving it with a substantial fare that it simply couldn't 'taxi-dodge'. While its arcade ports of *Virtua Cop*, *Daytona USA* and the *Virtua Fighter* series proved to be among the most prolific titles for the Saturn, the console failed to attract the wave of 'new gamers' that Sony had mined for with the PlayStation.

Sony's late entry into the console arena had shaken it violently. It was cleverly marketed to push gaming back into mainstream territories that it had not seen for almost a decade. It was successful in attracting a glut of new blood, and allowed timorous gamers



» A nice little nod to the NAOMI arcade board.

to finally release their discomforting skeletal passion for videogames from their closets.

It's difficult to comprehend why some of Sega's most diverse and original titles – and two envelope-pushing consoles – failed to reap the rewards it so wholeheartedly deserved. Sega truly came out with all guns blazing during that tumultuous gaming period, and no title supports this theory better than *Crazy Taxi*.

Taking the role of a maniacal taxi driver, the player must collect and deliver what seems to be an infinite number of customers to their desired destinations. The faster and more reckless you make the trip the more cash you earn. Three different coloured markers net the contesting fares: red, green, and yellow; with each colour indicating how far your money-squandering customers will ask you to travel.

The plentiful fares scattered around the game will contest for your attention. And despite witnessing you mount the kerb, plough into screaming pedestrians, flip a coach into the air and screech to a grinding halt, their reaction is not one of shock, or anger, but one of relief as they merrily jump into the back seat of your taxi, impatiently barking "take me to the Church, please".

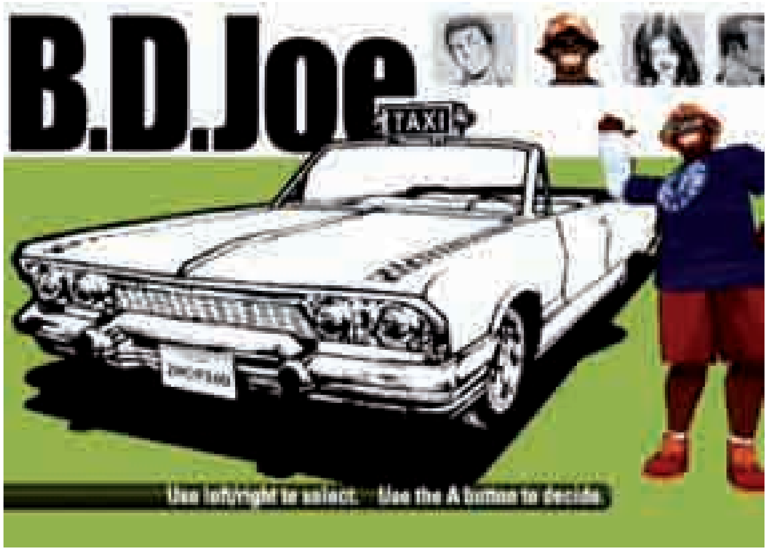
To help shave precious seconds off your time, as well as enabling you to earn bigger tips, the game introduced a number of special manoeuvres. And 'Crazy Through-ing' awarded points for irresponsible driving. Winding through tiny gaps in the traffic and leaping from multistorey car parks was a sure fire way to rack up the dollars from the overly excited passengers. The 'Crazy Drift' allowed tight corners and 'you're going the wrong ways' to be remedied with relative ease.

» When your time runs low, the passengers become more vocal and more annoying.



» Wow! There's something you don't see much of these days: a pig balancing on a green arrow."





» Here's the game's character select screen – which BD Joe seems overly happy about.

The whole game is played out in one city; an odd hybrid of the searing streets of California and the steep slopes of San Francisco. Trying to drive just a few inches over its snaking roads, occupied by a glutinous army of traffic, is a test for even the most dexterous of gamers.

As well as plentiful collision-fodder, the streets teemed with recognisable locales: Tower Records, The Fila Store, and um… Popcorn Mania, all set to send the green directional arrow into a swirling frenzy. The decision to have familiar looking brands juxtaposing against the wackiness of the game, is something that Kenji hoped would add to the game's charm.

"We all went into *Crazy Taxi* with the intention of making an enjoyable arcade experience with humour," he says. "We really wanted to make the player feel like they were driving in a real world, and felt that including the franchises was a good way of achieving this."

To accompany its brash visuals, the game needed a suitably strident soundtrack. Kenji remembers vividly the vast number of tracks he had to listen to, and the countless trips to music stores he made before stumbling across the perfect sound for the game.

The rocking fanfare he rested on – tracks by The Offspring and Bad Religion – might have proved a perfect catalyst for excitement-pheromones, but they're hardly the tunes to germinate a peaceful and productive working environment. But then, when painting such a rumbustious riot of colourful gameplay, I guess inspiration can be farmed from anywhere.

"I believe that music plays a very important aspect of getting the gameplay style right. The games soundtrack is usually chosen after the design of the game has been confirmed. I went from shop to shop listening to as many demos as possible, and during the latter stages of the game's development the team would listen to the songs while they worked," says Kenji.

Noticing that we're nearing the end of our journey, I catch a glimpse of an ominous red tally smiling back at me from the cab's meter. I hastily fire my last question at Kenji: 'If you were a taxi driver, who would you most like to have sitting in the back of your cab?' After pausing for thought, he answers: 'millionaires who tip generously, right?'

Perhaps this might explain why working a 50-second shift in *Crazy Taxi* can earn you such a ridiculous amount of money; the game's populated by tip-loving millionaires.

"IT WAS VERY DIFFICULT FOR US TO DRAW A CONSENSUS ON MAKING A GAME OUT OF THE 'TAXI' THEME. SOME OF THE TEAM WERE WORRIED THAT THE CONCEPT WOULDN'T BE COOL ENOUGH" KENJI ON HIS DIFFICULTY SELLING THE CRAZY TAXI IDEA

LIFE'S NOT FARE

Life was certainly harsh on the poor old Dreamcast. A vast library of killer apps, crisp arcade visuals and even a Tamagotchi for its control pad weren't enough to arm it during the last 'great' console war. The Dreamcast port of *Crazy Taxi* is a true testament to its awesome power. Released a year into its life, it actually improved on the arcade game in a number of ways. As well as offering a brand new city to run amok in, its quirky Crazy Box mode offered a plethora of addictive mini-games. Becoming the fourth best-selling game on the system ensured that its release would mark a prominent milestone in Sega's IP. The game would later spawn two sequels on the Dreamcast: *Crazy Taxi 2*, and *Crazy Taxi 3: High Roller*. Its latest incarnation comes in the portable form of *Crazy Taxi: Fare Wars* on the PSP. It features ports of both *Crazy Taxi 1* and *2* and is bundled with a new soundtrack. *Crazy Taxi* purists might be sad to hear that the game doesn't have the original licences. So, instead of pulling up outside KFC, players will now have to race to get to the likes of the rather grey-sounding FCS (Fried Chicken Shack).



» "I said Kentucky Fried Chicken, not Kentucky High Chicken!"



» Sorry, but would you seriously get in a cab with this man?



CYBERNATOR

'THE WILL TO CYBERNATE'



» **PUBLISHER:** KONAMI
» **RELEASED:** 1993
» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** SNES
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5-10



HISTORY

Driving a 50-foot assault-mech certainly has its advantages. No one's going to wheel clamp you for a start. There's plenty of room in the back for your shopping, and if the kids misbehave on the school run you can just drop them out of the missile bay and make them walk home.

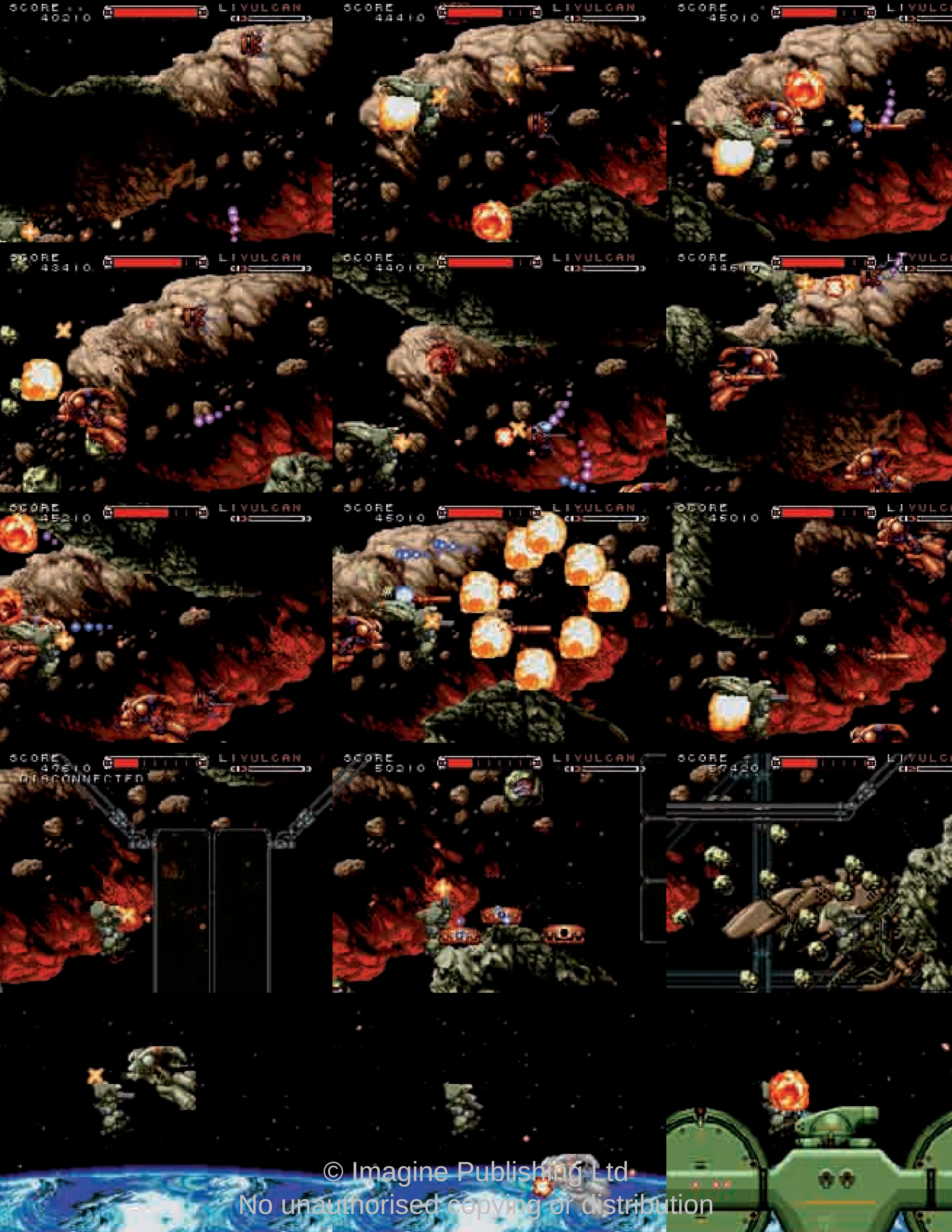
Originally released in Japan as '*Assault Suits Valken*', *Cybernator* unfortunately appears to have fallen foul of Nintendo's strict censorship policy – which was all the rage at the time of its release – resulting in the removal of a large portion of 'mature elements' that appeared in the original plot and helped to explain its nonsensical Western moniker.

No doubt whoever was in charge of classification at the time had been watching too many cyber-punk films. Presumably, Nintendo feared young minds being influenced by the word 'assault' and refused to commit to it.

Thankfully, despite its silly name, *Cybernator* was a visually spectacular and very challenging title that introduced a whole generation of SNES-owners to the delights of all things mecha. It required mastery of a number of defensive control elements, such as shield blocking and slide boosting away from danger, in tandem with the co-ordination of destructive mayhem that made learning the tricky controls worthwhile. Although your standard pea-shooter vulcan cannon and power-punch attacks are a little weedy to begin with, there are RPG-like levelling-up elements to the game, meaning that with use, they will power-up over time. (Later on, for example, you'll gain the ability to bounce bullets off walls.) And you can also collect a supplementary arsenal of missiles and lasers, which can be similarly upgraded.

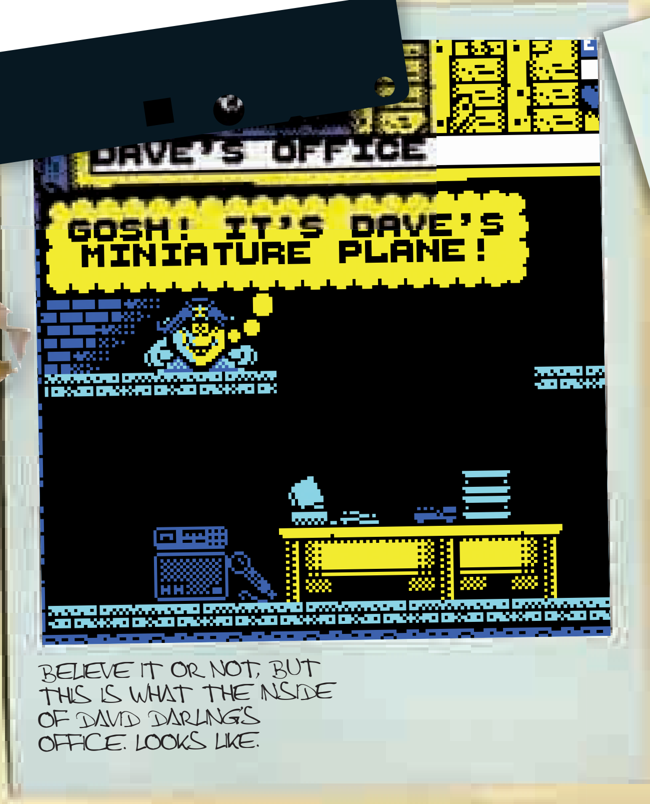
There are seven long levels, featuring a variation of run-and-gun platform stages, scrolling space shooter sections and impressively intimidating multi-screen bosses. Since we at **Retro Gamer** enjoy blowing stuff up with huge armed robots as much as the next person, we're big advocates of this game. And if Nintendo wants to tell us we're only doing a bit of light 'cybernation' then who are we to argue?




SCORE 40210
L I VULCAN
SCORE 44410
SCORE 45010
SCORE 43410
SCORE 44010
SCORE 45210
SCORE 46010
SCORE 47610
DISCONNECTED
SCORE 50210
SCORE 57420

COMPANY PROFILE

BIG RED SOFTWARE



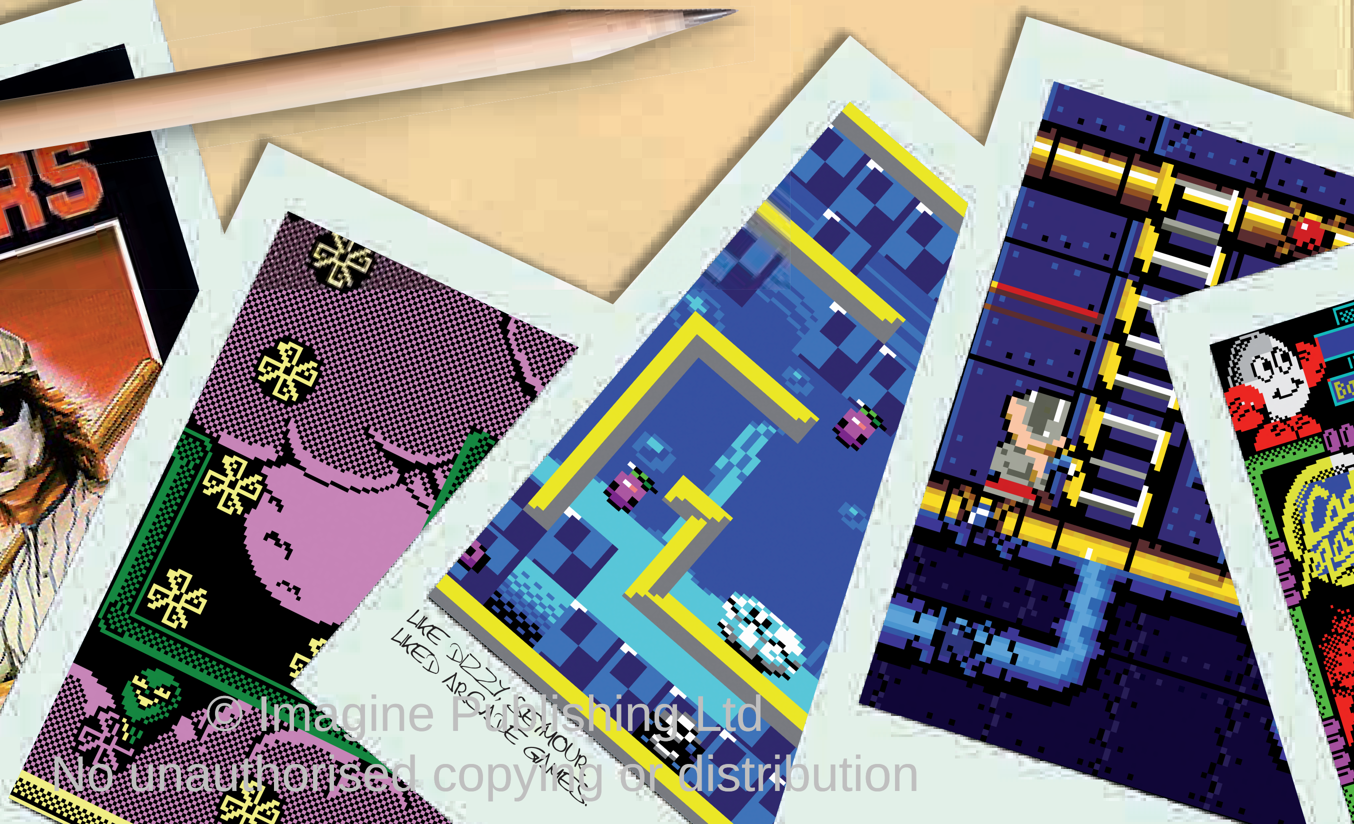
BELIEVE IT OR NOT, BUT THIS IS WHAT THE INSIDE OF DAVID DARLING'S OFFICE LOOKS LIKE.



CJ THE ELEPHANT WAS ANOTHER CUTE HERO..

DISCOVER THE GENESIS OF POPULAR 8-BIT HERO SEYMOUR





LIKE DIZZY, SEYMOUR LIKED ARCADE GAMES.

PAINTING THE TOWN BIG RED

It started small but hit some dizzying heights – Big Red was responsible for some of the most well-known games in 8-bit history. David Crookes looks back at the rise and fall of a developer whose talent continues to entertain us today…



» He may not have been as cool as Dizzy, but Seymour was still a popular character.

Paul Ranson is sitting in his living room, children charging around him. 'Shall we leave you to it,' we ask him. "No, I'm fine to talk," he answers and launches into a potted history of his former company, Big Red Software, remembering the minutest of details and a host of names. "Is anyone actually interested in Big Red?" he inquires, laughing. "I was around 19 or 20 when I set it up. I'm 40 now."

Grown up he may be, but his love of games remains. Having decided against joining the Royal Air Force, he left sixth form and began his career as a programmer for Binary Design. After three to four years, the firm was employing 40 staff, all managed by Paul. "I had to make a decision," he says. "And at that time, setting up your own company and doing your own thing was the trend – so that's what I did, setting up an office in a warehouse in Macclesfield and forming my own company, Big Red. I simply don't know how the name came about."

The firm started writing titles such as the *Fun School* series for Europress and began knocking out the likes of *Double Dragon* for the Spectrum and European Superleague for the Amiga. It wasn't long before Big Red was on its way to success.

At that time, there were only a handful of people at the firm. Paul was manager and Spectrum/Amstrad CPC programmer. His brother, Pete, was the resident artist; Gary Hughes programmed the PC and Amiga; and all Commodore 64 work was outsourced to freelancer Andy Torkington. Freelance musicians sorted out the music.

"That was pretty much standard in those days," says programmer Fred Williams, who joined shortly after Binary Design closed down in 1990, and brought Spectrum and Amstrad experience with him. Not only that, but he also took along half-completed Binary project *New York Warriors*. "That got me the job," says Fred.

As well as games, the company also put together a few non-games: basically interactive puzzles for a Eurotunnel exhibition centre and a tutorial for a steel-refining plant. As the money rolled in from such projects, Big Red was able to move to plusher premises.

Things were looking good. "We were pretty much in cahoots with Codemasters by then," says Fred, pointing toward the close relationship Paul had fostered with Codies founders Richard and David Darling. Big Red had been touting its *Wacky Darts* game to every budget Spectrum publisher it could think of, having been inspired by Binary Design's darts game *180*. That game had sold via Mastertronic and managed to shift 300,000 copies. Paul showed the Darlings the sales figures as an indication of how well it could do and Codemasters snapped up the game. From that moment on, the two companies were inseparable.

"The Darlings liked what they saw," says Paul. "They were impressed by our output and our games and they asked me to run Codemasters Business Limted. It meant I had to commute between Big Red in Macclesfield and Leamington for my work with Codemasters. It also meant the Darlings could concentrate on their top secret projects, the Game Genie for the consoles and things like that."

It was a relationship that was as integral to Codemasters as The Oliver Twins, the legendary creators of the *Dizzy* series. But because the Olivers were busy creating a *Dizzy* game for the NES, Big Red was asked to produce *Dizzy IV*, aka *Magicland Dizzy*. It was the biggest game in the series to date and was well received by the gaming press.

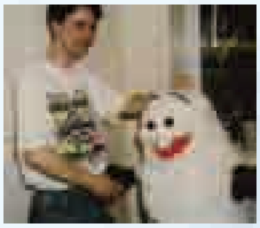
The fourth game in the franchise was so successful that programmer Jon Cartwright was asked to write *Dizzy Prince Of The Yolkfolk*. He had only joined the company in 1991 on a summer job, so to get that particular gig was impressive – so impressive that, following the completion of his computer science degree, the Spectrum and CPC specialist got a full-time job with Big Red.

Dizzy Prince Of The Yolkfolk only really existed because Codies needed a title for a *Dizzy V* game pack to sell that Christmas but it did well, prompting Big Red Software to knock up a further *Dizzy* title in which the egg-shaped character was going to flit between movie plots in a Hollywood setting. It was to be called *Movieland Dizzy*.

It caused a massive argument between Codemasters, the Olivers (who created

IN BRIEF

Paul Ranson left Binary Design to set up his own company. He called it Big Red – a name that really was thought up in a pub and scribbled on a beer mat. Having become friendly with Codemasters, the developer worked on games such as *Dizzy*, *Micro Machines* and *Seymour* but a falling out with Codemasters, a takeover by Domark and a sale to Eidos marked the end of the firm. It was subsequently ignored by Eidos which meant the company fizzled out in a manner not in sync with its triumphant beginnings.


» And you thought Seymour was a mass of pixels. Nope, he was real. And he worked at Big Red! Paul Ranson shakes his hand.

BLITZ GAMES

The Oliver Twins – brothers Philip and Andrew – employed many of the old Big Red staff. As Philip says, "In the early days of Codemasters, we all worked together and all socialised together. We respected the work they did and we all shared lots of ideas. Andrew and I only had the usual 24 hours in a day and more opportunities than we could handle, so we sub-contracted the development of several *Dizzy* games to Big Red. They did a great job and then wanted to do their own thing which was completely understandable.

"Over the years we went our separate ways and Big Red was purchased by Eidos, but were still located in Leamington Spa. When Eidos decided it no longer wanted this remote studio in August 1999 we moved in and offered them jobs. Most of them are still at Blitz and still enjoying making great games."

COMPANY PROFILE

BIG RED



» *Super Seymour* was a huge hit on the Commodore 64, achieving a staggering 94 per cent in *Zzap!64*.



Dizzy) and Big Red. The Codies felt that *Dizzy* should remain in fantasy settings and should not be pitted in a realistic game. Big Red felt it would take the series in a fresh direction. Codemasters won the row and *Dizzy* was removed from the game. A new, chumpier character replaced him and Seymour was born.

"Codemasters and the Olivers preferred to keep Dizzy in his home fantasy environment," explains Fred. "But we argued that the movieland design didn't actually feature any real-world film studio stuff and was entirely set in the movies themselves. But there was no way we could persuade them so we tweaked the game so that we ended up with real-world studio stuff with a new character although we kept the *Dizzy* graphic adventure title engine. We thought if you've got a game mechanic that works, just keep using it."

The result was *Seymour Goes to Hollywood* and it was followed up with *Wild West Seymour*, a game that had actually been pitched at the same time as *Movieland Dizzy*.

"*Wild West Seymour* wasn't a graphic adventure at all to begin with," Fred reveals. "It was intended to be something like *Feud*, with two characters running around a maze collecting bits of, well, something, to throw at each other. The title, though not the design, later got re-used for *Seymour's* stab at the 'episodic gaming' genre."

Big Red was proud of Seymour. It was keen to differentiate the character from Dizzy who was an egg and moved around by performing somersaults and leaping around platforms. *Seymour* had more puzzles, with the platforms taking second place. "We also made sure the plots were very different," says Fred. "The Dizzies tend to be 'Dizzy's got everyone into trouble, and has to get them all out of the mess he put them in', and set in fairytale worlds. *Seymour's* plots were about everyone being let down by someone else. Seymour had to step in and make everything right by cheering people up.'"

Shortly after, Big Red was called upon to produce *Dizzy III.V*, a demo version of *Dizzy IV* earmarked for a *Crash* cassette. Codemasters had wanted the *Dizzy* game to consist of the first few rooms, but since *Magicland Dizzy's* beginning is simply 'walk left and jump the shark', it wasn't much fun.

Fred scribbled a four-room introduction design, Pete created new graphics (and with such a small adventure, he could include big animated objects like a teleportation machine), and two days later the covertape demo was complete. Unfortunately, *Crash* then decided to describe the newly introduced youngster egg as Dizzy's son. "It got us into no end of trouble with the Olivers," said Fred. "He's just a generic young egg, okay?" A similar demo was created for *Seymour* called *Take 1*. This time the design was completed over a weekend with a further two days implementing the film recording and playback work. It was used on *Your Sinclair* and *Amstrad Action* covertapes.

When *Wild West Seymour* was released in 1992, things changed even more. Big Red decided that people didn't like the way the games were getting bigger and increasingly complicated, particularly because games in those days didn't have a Quick Save feature and they had to be played through in one sitting. So it went for episodes.

Fred said: "The little covertape game, *Seymour Take 1*, had proved popular so we thought why not release a series of something sort of in between sized? It was an idea before its time and ended up being implemented oddly, with all of the episodes bundled into a single title."



» *Magicland Dizzy* on the Spectrum featured many nods to both fairy tales and mythology.

In the same year, travelling was proving quite difficult for Paul and so he decided to move Big Red again. It took residence on an industrial estate outside Leamington Spa, a stone's throw from Codemasters HQ.

By day, Big Red produced 8-bit games while at night it found Game Genie codes. It meant the team burnt the midnight oil disassembling Z80 code and using logic analysers to work out when lives were lost. Jon laughs: "We had a writer called Keith Stuart who was writing the inane '30 worders' for the Game Genie code manual. He wrote some stuff that cracked me up: 'Doctor Mario: He's the master surgeon of mirth, he's the gynaecologist of giggles, he's Doctor Mario'. Probably not the marketing line Nintendo would have used." Keith Stuart currently writes for *The Guardian*.

With the move to Leamington, it was time for another recruitment drive. Lyndon Homewood and Chris Swan were taken on (both now working for Blitz Games. One of Lyndon's major projects was on the PC port of *Micro Machines* which Fred and Jon also contributed to.

Fred also produced *Micro Machines* for the Game Boy. It was risky since Codemasters were still in Nintendo's bad books and the company was debating whether it would be producing any Game Boy titles at all. Big Red went ahead regardless, using the Codie's in-house manufactured Orac development kits that had been created alongside the Game Boy Game Genie's Software. It was eventually released by Ocean.

In 1993, another move was on the cards. Big Red moved to Southam, sharing offices with a microscope distributor, while switching from last-gen development for Codemasters to PC

BIG RED WAS KEEN TO DIFFERENTIATE SEYMOUR FROM DIZZY WHO WAS AN EGG AND MOVED AROUND BY PERFORMING SOMERSAULTS

SEGA CARTRIDGES

Codemasters manufactured its own Sega cartridges and had a small factory on an industrial estate in Leamington. Big Red wrote the QA software which allowed the Codies to see if the carts had burnt correctly. For the Game Gear, Big Red snuck in a little *Pong* game that you could play link-up with any Codies Game Gear carts: you just held down Start at boot up.



development with Domark. But the company still created outsource-style artwork for *Micro Machines 2* on Genesis.

Other new blood was brought in, including Mark Neesam, Paul Jennings, Brian Hartley, Rich Jones, Mike Procter, Tom Adams (all of whom were artists of various flavours since games were starting to become significantly more art heavy). The firm also employed its own musical talent rather than relying on freelancers. Enter Gez Gourley and a huge collection of keyboards and other mysterious devices with knobs on.

Yet relations between Big Red and Codemasters had become strained, leading to a parting of the ways in 1993. Despite that, Codies founder David Darling, who recently sold his remaining shares in the firm, has fond memories of Big Red. "They did a lot of games for us," he said. "They were very productive, hard working and a fun bunch of guys to work with. For Paul to became our development manager and still manage Big Red must have been quite hard work. They had some impressive staff: Fred, one of their programmes, is very, very good and the developer's strength was that they concentrated on gameplay and were original and innovative."

Big Red Software continued without Codemasters and began working on three-dimensional games, among them *Tank Commander*. It was the most expensive title Big Red had ever produced, costing £80,000 and it was earmarked for a Domark release. Paul had been approached by Domark and later had been invited out to the E3 show that year, spending time on the flight sitting next to Philip Oliver.

It was to be a disaster personally for Paul – his baggage had gone missing so the only clothes he had were the ones he was wearing – but professionally, it worked out well. He was introduced to the men behind Eidos and a series of lengthy meetings followed. They let him in on the secret that Eidos was going to float the business on the stock exchange and they said they were impressed by Big Red's work. *Tank Commander* was well received on its release, in particular for its use of local area networks.

At the time Big Red was also working with some of the very early 3D graphics cards from Yamaha and a variety of the VR headsets. Jon recalls: "I had a visit from the Yamaha guys and Paul was out of the country so it was down to me to entertain them. They were quite keen to go sample some local beer so I took them to a pub in Leamington and then asked where they'd like to go to eat. I took them for a curry."

Soon, Big Red was working on *Big Red Racing*, producing it from the firm's new office in Southam. It was another massive

WE BECAME MORE MARGINAL AND AS EIDOS BOUGHT MORE COMPANIES IT BECAME CLEAR WE WERE NOT GOING ANYWHERE

title for the firm and was released in 1995. Fred says: "I'd written the map-renderer and editor for *Tank Commander*, and wrote a split-screen jeep-racing game demo using the same engine. Mark Neesam put a level together, and it grew from there. It's the last game that I can claim to have both designed and coded. There's a fair amount of programmer art in there too. Games are getting too big for that wide a job role these days, though downloadable games look like reviving the idea."

Artist Brian Hartley says *Big Red Racing* was his first real 3D game. "Creating 3D models of the vehicles was something that has stayed in my memory. I used graph paper to draw out the initial design, then typed the relevant co-ordinates into a text file. It seems almost surreal when you consider the advances in technology over the last ten years or so."

Domark, which had loved *Tank Commander* so much it bought Big Red for £300,000 of shares and £100,000 in cash, released *Big Red Racing*. But in 1995, Domark was taken over by Eidos which wanted Big Red to produce *Tank Commander 2*. "That game was canned," says Paul. "It's a real shame because as time went on Eidos kept forgetting we existed. We became more marginal and, as they bought more companies, it became clear that we were not really going anywhere. So I left."

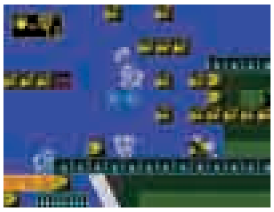
Brian recalls starting work on the ant-based *Swarm Troopers* following the Eidos takeover. "We moved to offices in what used to be a large Victorian country house but is now, sadly, a business park on the outskirts of Stratford-upon-Avon," he says. "Although it was an amazing place to work, the projects that we worked on never really took off. The company expanded slightly, and work started on what ended-up being *Assault Corps*.

"It was about this time Paul Ranson left, and Jon Cartwright took over as studio head. We then moved to premises on The Parade in Leamington Spa, where work continued on *Assault Corps*. Sadly things didn't work out… I eventually left and joined Silicon Dreams in 1998."

Jon adds: "The problem was Eidos bought US Gold and thus Core and also snapped up Domark, Big Red and Simis. Unlike the Codemasters years though, when we could produce more or less anything and they'd cheerfully release it on the grounds that the vast majority of it would float, Eidos weren't interested in anything we put together.

Out of that spending spree, they'd got *Tomb Raider*, of course, which took quite a bit of living up to. We were in the slightly bizarre situation of being paid by Eidos, but pitching our games to Mindscape and Acclaim, and having them pull out, often quite late into development. After rather too much of this, Eidos pulled the plug."

Big Red Software changed its name to Corrosive Software and Jon attempted a management buy-out to allow the team to finish the PC/PSone game *Hard Corps* with Acclaim. It didn't come off and the Big Red story ended, many of its staff managed to get jobs with Blitz Games, which was run by the Oliver Twins. Still, one thing is for sure, the Big Red Software name will not be forgotten…



» The Spectrum version of *CJ in the USA*. Watch out for dangerous dogs and rampant American footballers.



» An advert for the Game Gear 's *Game Genie*. Who said cheaters never prosper?



» The Game Genie in all its glory. Nintendo weren't fans of the NES and SNES versions.





BIG RED

THE GAMES OF BIG RED



NEW YORK WARRIORS

» With the year 2014 and New York about to explode – a bomb at the top of the World Trade Center! – you take on the role of a lone solider shooting his way across the city in a game that was snatched from the dead remains of Binary Design. Difficult and slow, it isn't a fine moment.

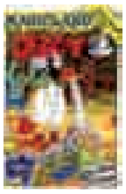




WACKY DARTS

» This game brought Big Red to the attention of Codemasters, hoping to suck on the success of Mastertronic's *180*. With seven characters to play against and alternatives to darts, including bullets and arrows, this game is fun albeit frustrating since the collision detection is woefully poor and can lead to some hair-pulling results.

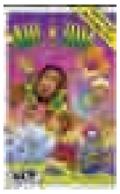




MAGICLAND DIZZY

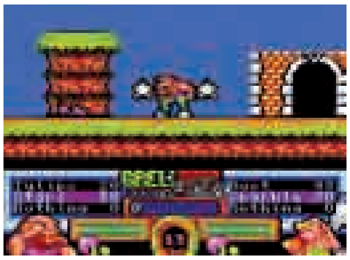
» Taking over from the Oliver Twins, Big Red produced its first *Dizzy* game. Evil wizard Zaks has to be defeated in this 'eggs-cellent' game – if he doesn't his Yolkfolk pals will be forever trapped until the nasty one's spell. The addition of an energy bar and the need to collect 30 diamonds adds to the fun. It was included in the *Dizzy Collection*.

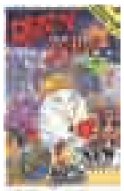




GRELL AND FALLA

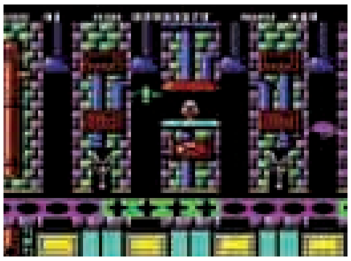
» How does your garden grow? In this game, it's time to find out as you try to keep the insects away from your lovely patch of land. Get Grell, a gnome who can kill those insects and Falla, a fun fairy who uses magic dust to nurture the perfect garden. Fast, fun, cartoony it was Big Red/Codemasters at their most typical.

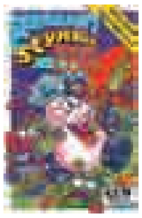




PANIC DIZZY

» Dizzy stars in a puzzle game (one of many spin-offs for the character) in which you must align falling shapes into the correct holes. Criticised by many for merely including Dizzy to make the game fly off the shelves, it is nevertheless worth a try. Again it was also included in *Dizzy's Excellent Adventures*.

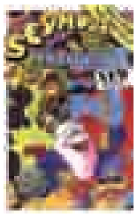




SERGEANT SEYMOUR: ROBOTCOP

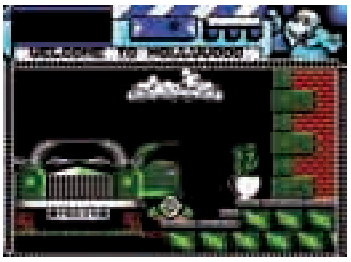
» A familiar-sounding name marks this *Seymour* game and, as you can guess, our lovable character is not only a cop but a robotic one at that. With an extending arm too. The aim of this difficult game is to kill the bad guys within a time limit in order to progress.

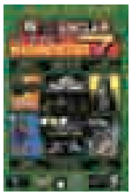




SEYMOUR GOES TO HOLLYWOOD

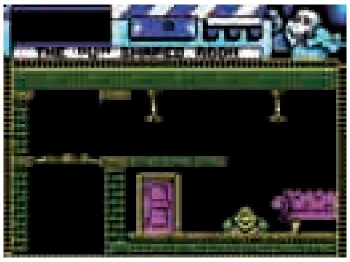
» This is the game which began the *Seymour* series, and what a debut it is. Taking more than a lead from *Dizzy*, the game is hot on puzzles but with real-life references from *Grease*, *The Wizard Of Oz* and, er, *Flash Boredom*. It's a big game, and hard too, but worth persevering with.





SEYMOUR TAKE ONE

» This cut-down version of *Seymour Goes to Hollywood* found itself nailed to the *Amstrad Action* and *Your Sinclair* cover cassettes and it's a great game in its own right, having none of the problems of the parent game – that being the sprawling lots around which Seymour treads. It got many people interested in the character.

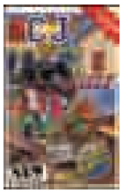




WILD WEST SEYMOUR

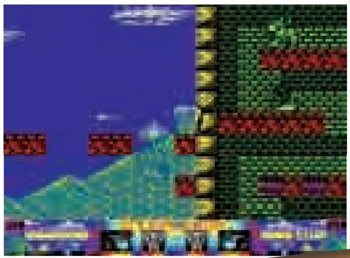
» Originally a *Feud*-style game, this was turned into a graphic adventure and pitched as a follow-up to *Seymour Goes to Hollywood*. Set over three acts, it was an easier game than its predecessor and also centred around Seymour being in the movies – the aim being to get back missing equipment.

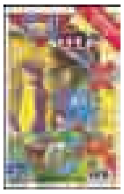




CJ'S ELEPHANT ANTICS

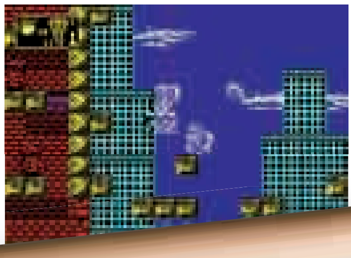
» On his way to an English zoo, CJ uses an umbrella as a parachute, jumps from a plane and ends up in France. The aim? To get to Africa over a series of jerkily scrolling platforms while avoiding predictable baddies and nasty spikes. It's colourful, challenging and has a great two-player option. Also included on *Quattro Mega Stars*.

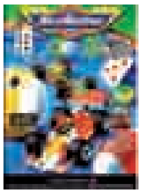




CJ IN THE USA

» Having got back to Africa, CJ was faced with yet another problem. His brothers and sisters had been kidnapped and dispersed across America. So you have to help him find them. It's another platform title with imagination. From shooting peanuts to tackling American footballers, you'll soon eat up your nine lives.





MICRO MACHINES

» This is one of Codemasters' all-time classic games. Fred Williams created the Game Boy version and it retains the variation and wackiness of the franchise. The top-down view and miniature cars enthralled a generation. And with 21 tracks and up to four opponents to race against, you were seldom bored.





TANK COMMANDER

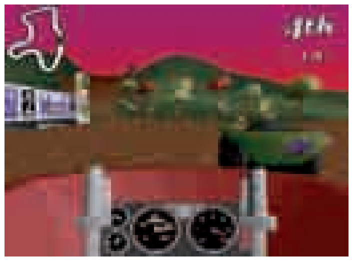
» Think of a brilliant multiplay tank sim and you get *Tank Commander*, a game released by Domark. Play one of seven missions in a variety of settings, blasting your way through the scenery at speed with an impressive range of weapons. The graphics look dated now but it's still a major challenge.

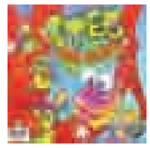




BIG RED RACING

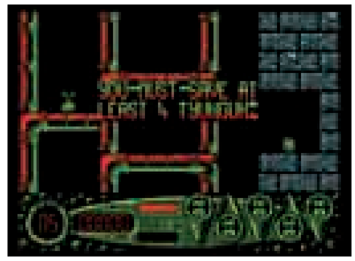
» These guys must have been on something when they made this racing game. After all, pitting snowploughs against snow mobiles and throwing a whole host of other ill-matched affairs your way is hardly sane. Yet it worked and while the game doesn't often get spoken about today it still has a lot going for it.

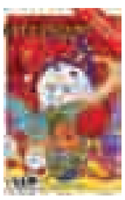




STEG THE SLUG

» It may be sluggish at times but the premise is still a lot of fun and worth sticking with. Ten levels, all very samey, revolving around blowing bubbles to catch crawling grubs in order for them to flout up and feed Steg's little slugs. It's a challenge, that's for sure – mainly because the difficulty level is pitched far too high towards the end.





SPELLBOUND DIZZY

» With a whopping 105 screens, the fifth Dizzy adventure is a big, bad beast. Stonking graphics combine with rich gameplay and variety, and while at times it feels just a tad too large, it is packed with enough features to make it stands head and shoulders above the previous games in the series. It was included in *Dizzy's Excellent Adventures*.





SUPER SEYMOUR SAVES THE PLANET

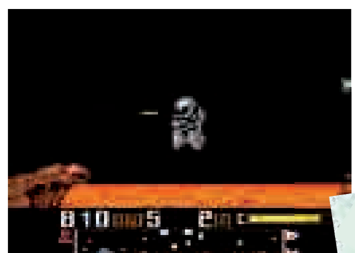
» As possibly the worst *Seymour* game, Planet looks and feels old. It's not a game you'll return to and neither is the premiseis not that original, but clear up some toxic waste while collecting tokens around each single-screen level. There is little to recommend as the game boasts average graphics and sound.





DROPZONE

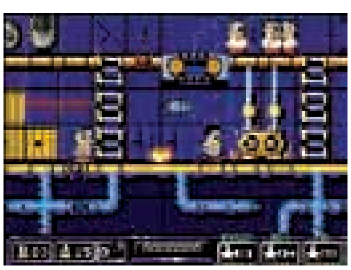
» Big Red produced the Game Gear port of this classic Archer Maclean game back in 1994. It's a decent conversion, taking the *Defender* influences and using them well as you grab a jetpack and attempt to rescue and return a group of scientists from their alien attackers. It was good to see it on the Sega handheld.





SINK OR SWIM

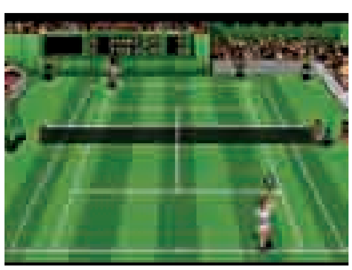
» Big Red Software loved the Game Gear which is why it was only too happy to port many games to it, including *Sink Or Swim*. It was originally released in 1993 for the PC but converted well to the Game Gear with little magic lost. Kevin's attempts to save passengers are hindered by the fact they are so thick.

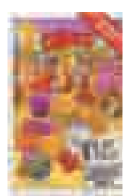




PETE SAMPRAS TENNIS

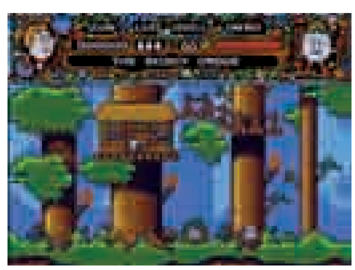
» Another Big Red port, also for Game Gear, *Pete Sampras Tennis* lets you play in either a challenge match, tournament or world tour. You can also play Crazy Tennis – watch out for a cameo Dizzy appearance. Fiddly controls ruin the title, which is a shame because it's a fine game that demands a go.





PRINCE OF THE YOLK FOLK

» With an evil troll having taken over the castle, Dizzy is called upon to save the kingdom in an adventure packed with puzzles. You have to use your brain but there are only 30 screens to get around. Short though it is, it's one of the best *Dizzy* games to date. It was included in *Dizzy's Excellent Adventures*.



WORKING FOR BIG RED

Programmer Jon Cartwright says the days working at Big Red were among the best of his life and he saw the firm grow from a small operation into a large-ish concern. "Our second to last office was an old manor house on 16 acres next to the river Avon in Stratford," he says. "Perhaps we had delusions of grandeur because it turned out to be pretty impractical in the end. Still, the rooftop barbecues that we had a few times were fun."

He says his university was distinctly unimpressed when he said he was going into videogames and recruitment in the early stages was revolved around employing friends or friends of friends. "To begin with, programming games at Big Red used to be one programmer and half an artist – Pete – to a game and they took around six weeks. We literally threw a floppy disc to each other with content on. It was funny to see in just a few short years how many people and how long it took to make a game."





Magicland was Big Red Software's very first Dizzy gig and led to many sequels.

CAPCOM'S CPS-2 SYSTEM

CAPCOM'S POPULAR AND LONG-SERVING CPS-2 JAMMA HARDWARE RULED THE VIDEOGAME ARCADE SCENE DURING THE MID-TO-LATE NINETIES, THANKS MAINLY TO THE SUCCESS OF A CERTAIN FIGHTING FRANCHISE AND ITS BEAT-'EM-UP BRETHREN. MIKE BEVAN EXAMINES CAPCOM'S 2D ARCADE POWERHOUSE AND SELECTS A FEW EXCEPTIONAL GAMING HIGHLIGHTS FROM ITS DISTINGUISHED BACK CATALOGUE

By the early-Nineties Capcom had found its arcade groove. Its Capcom Play System 1 (CPS-1) JAMMA board had been a hugely successful platform, with titles such as *Strider, Ghouls 'N Ghosts, Final Fight* and, of course, *Street Fighter II* becoming big, global money-spinners for the company. However, the system, which had debuted in 1988 with the arcade shoot-'em-up *Forgotten Worlds*, was soon to come to the end of its short commercial life span due to one huge drawback. CPS-1 boards with their non-encrypted ROM sets were notoriously easy pickings for arcade bootleggers, and mass produced pirate copies of CPS-1 games were becoming a big problem for Capcom.

The final straw came with the 1991 release of *Street Fighter II: The World Warrior*. With this, the genesis of Capcom's potentially most profitable arcade franchise, and its two subsequent CPS-1 sequels, the company found to its horror, that in arcades in many global territories, cheap *Street Fighter II* bootleg boards were reportedly radically out-numbering genuine Capcom ones.

In response to these worrying levels of arcade bootlegging, Capcom began work on what was to become the Capcom Play System 2 (CPS-2). The existing CPS-1 hardware was modified, upgrading its Motorola 68000 CPU to 16MHz (from the CPS-1's 10MHz clock speed), improving its custom sound capabilities, and implementing a complex encryption algorithm to encode the board ROMs to prevent unauthorised copying. The new system was to outwardly have a radical new design overhaul.

Where the CPS-1 hardware had comprised a base motherboard, with an affixed top board containing the actual game ROMs, which was sold in its entirety for each arcade title. The CPS-2 system would instead consist of two sealed, separately sold units, the motherboard (or 'A' board) and the game (or 'B') board. Arcade owners would therefore be able to purchase the 'A' board, required to run the CPS-2 arcade games as many times as they required,



» *19XX* was the first game in the *1942* series. Released in 1995, it is arguably the best game in the franchise.

depending on their arcade cabinet quota, and purchase supplementary 'B' boards that contained the actual games as they were released, cutting down the unnecessary expense of paying for a system motherboard for each game. Capcom made this new marketing strategy even more tempting by offering arcade owners cashback incentives on purchasing new CPS-2 titles when returning 'B' boards of games no longer being operated. In the US, for example, the manufacturer discounted a considerable $150 off the price of new releases in return for any CPS-2 boards no longer proving profitable for their owners.

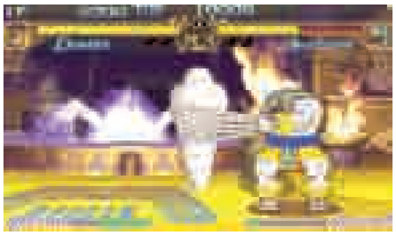
Of course, none of this would have mattered if the quality of the games themselves wasn't high enough to attract substantial numbers of arcade users. And here, Capcom had all bases covered. When the system launched in 1993 the first new title for the fledgling arcade platform was to be, naturally enough, the latest incarnation of its famous fighting franchise. *Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers* marked the

QSOUND ON THE CPS-2 BOARD

All CPS-2 hardware games feature 'QSound Virtual Audio', a high-quality positional stereo sound delivery system, originally developed for Capcom by Canadian-based company QSound Labs. This audio system had previously been used on a limited number of CPS-1 games, including, *Cadillacs & Dinosaurs* and *Warriors Of Fate*. CPS-2 QSound hardware was marketed to arcade operators as delivering a more realistic and immersive three-dimensional audio experience on their existing stereo arcade cabinet stock. Operators were hopeful of drawing further custom from arcade-goers attracted to games such as *Street Fighter Alpha* and *Marvel Super Heroes*, whose volumes had been deliberately cranked up to exploit the hardware's next-generation audio capabilities.

QSound works by introducing minute phase delays into the left and right components of the stereo audio signal, causing the listener to perceive that sounds are coming not just directly from the speakers, but from various positions in empty space around them. For best results it's necessary to have a decent audio set-up, and be equally distant between both stereo sources. You'll also need to connect your audio hardware directly to the QSound RCA phono jack outputs on the CPS-2 'A' board.

Although not utilised in the subsequent CPS-3 arcade hardware, QSound was included in Capcom's ZN (PSone based) arcade releases in the mid-to-late Nineties, such as *Rival Schools* and *Street Fighter EX*. This was probably the height of the sound system's popularity, with many home console and PC releases of this era, such as Capcom's own *Resident Evil 2*, Bullfrog's *Populous 3* and Psygnosis' *G-Police* also licensed to feature QSound audio.



» *DarkStalkers* made its debut on the CPS-2 and featured bold, cartoony visuals and suitably wacky characters.



» Haggar takes time out from running Metro City to kick arse in *Saturday Night Slam Masters*.

first appearance of a certain green leotarded blonde called Cammy, and her signature 'Cannon Spike' flip-kick. This highly popular addition to the *Street Fighter* canon was soon joined by a number of other, excellent CPS-2 releases such as *Eco Fighters*, *Alien Vs. Predator*, and the first of two officially licensed *Dungeons & Dragons* scrolling beat-'em-ups, *Tower Of Doom*, which hit arcades in 1994.

These titles set the tone for the majority of future releases on the system, which would become justly famous for its beautifully designed and extremely playable 2D fighters, shoot-'em-ups and scrolling beat-'em-up action games. Benchmark series, which debuted on CPS-2, include the *Marvel Vs.*, *DarkStalkers* and *Street Fighter Alpha* franchises. Third-party developed shoot-'em-ups such as *Giga Wing* (1999) and *Mars Matrix* (2000) both by Takumi, and *Dimahoo* and *1944* (2000) by Raizing would later complement in-house titles such as the superlative *19XX*.



» *Eco Fighters*: A great arcade shoot-'em-up with an ecofriendly message.

As the Nineties wore on, and the popularity of 2D began to wane in favour of three-dimensional arcade racers, fighters and gun games, CPS-2 releases became more sporadic. Capcom was now experimenting with polygon-based arcade technology, such as the Sony ZN-series boards (actually based directly on PSone hardware), which would soon host titles such as *Street Fighter EX* (1995) and *Rival Schools* (1997). The *Alpha* series of *Street Fighter* games that had been



» Capcom's attempt to sell the CPS-2 system to arcade operators proved rather fruitful.

"SUCCESS WOULDN'T HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE IF GAME QUALITY HADN'T BEEN HIGH ENOUGH TO ATTRACT SUBSTANTIAL NUMBERS OF ARCADE USERS"



» Sean Connery makes an uncredited cameo in Capcom's sequel to *U.N. Squadron*.

WHAT IS 'JAMMA'?

JAMMA (Japanese Amusement Machine Manufacturers' Association) is a standardised plug-and-play system devised for arcade game boards dating from 1985 onwards. JAMMA boards have a 56-way edge connector, which slots painlessly into the female JAMMA harness wired into an arcade cabinet. Therefore, making it very easy for operators to update or change their games without resorting to any complex wiring modifications. Luckily, this also makes the life of home arcade game hobbyists a lot easier as well.

CPS-2 TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

BOARD TYPE: JAMMA

MAIN CPU: CUSTOM 68000 @ 16MHZ

COLOURS PER OBJECT TILE: 16

COLOUR PALETTE: 32

TOTAL COLOURS ON SCREEN: 4096

OBJECT NUMBER: 900 (16X16)

SOUND CHANNELS: 16 STEREO CHANNELS WITH QSOUND

MAXIMUM CAPACITY: 322 MEGABITS

SCROLL FACES: 3

RESOLUTION: 384X224

DEBUT GAME: SUPER STREET FIGHTER II (1993)

FINAL RELEASE: HYPER STREET FIGHTER II (2003)

CPS-2 TERRITORY CODING AND A/B BOARD COMPATIBILITY

CPS-2 GAME ('B') BOARDS WERE RELEASED IN FIVE REGION-CODED COLOURS, USUALLY REQUIRING THE CORRECT TERRITORIAL MOTHERBOARD ('A' BOARD) TO OPERATE CORRECTLY

THE REGION COLOURS WERE:

GREEN: JAPAN

BLUE: NORTH AMERICA AND EUROPE

ORANGE: SOUTH AMERICA

GREY: ASIAN TERRITORIES (OUTSIDE JAPAN)

YELLOW: RENTAL VERSIONS (ALL TERRITORIES)

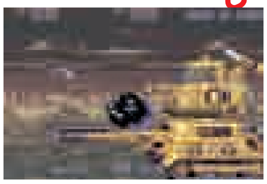
The exceptions to this rule were the Blue and Green 'B' boards, which are interchangeable with motherboards from either territory, handily meaning that its perfectly possible to play Japanese or US CPS-2 games on a European 'A' board and vice versa. Yellow 'rental' boards will work on any motherboard, being released by Capcom as 'trial' products designed to entice arcade operators into buying each respective game in full.



ARCADE Inspection

TEN of the best

A SELECTION OF THE CPS-2 SYSTEM'S MOST NOTABLE MOMENTS, ALONG WITH A CURRENT MARKET VALUE FOR EACH GAME ('B') BOARD IN USED CONDITION. ADD AROUND £20 TO £25 IF YOU WANT THE PRICE FOR THE COMPLETE A/B BOARD-SET



ECO FIGHTERS (1994)

A very early release on the system, this was also Capcom's final in-house attempt at a traditional side-scrolling arcade shoot-'em-up. Famously the result of a Japanese competition to come up with an idea for a Capcom arcade game, it's a very pretty cartoon-style shooter with an unusual and slightly bonkers environmental theme. *Eco Fighters* pinches the revolving 'pod' mechanic from *Prehistoric Isle*, and throws in some highly original weapons, such as the hilarious 'yo-yo-of-doom' (TM **Retro Gamer**), and let's you dish them out wholesale against polluting, corporate, capitalist scum. Because we know you want to.

Expect to pay: £50 – £75

Home conversions: PS2 Capcom Classics Volume 2, PSP Capcom Classics Reloaded

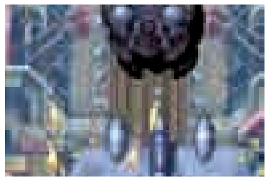


ALIEN VS. PREDATOR (1994)

This was licensed as a tie-in for a movie that never happened (well, it did, but not until ten years later. But let's try and put that behind us, eh?). *Alien Vs. Predator* is one of Capcom's finest and most enjoyable scrolling beat-'em-ups ever. Try to imagine '*Final Fight* meets Giger'. But with incredibly big guns. *Alien Vs. Predator* featured beautifully hand-drawn, anime-style characters and backgrounds. With varied, highly evocative levels and some great boss sections (such as a brilliantly realised encounter with an Alien Queen). It's considerably more enjoyable than the tragically misguided 2004 film. And yes… you do get to play as Predator. In fact, if you've got a mate they can play as Predator too…

Expect to pay: £40 – £50

Home conversions: None



19XX: THE WAR AGAINST DESTINY (1995)

Strap on your fire-resistant underwear and take to the skies. The fourth game in the long-running WWII shoot-'em-up saga that kicked off with the classic *1942*, is arguably the best game in the series. *19XX* is bigger and more intense than previous instalments. Adding an excellent 'lock-on' missile system and smart bombs to the mix, along with lovingly animated bosses, such as an enormous three-screen-high battleship that makes the Turpitz look like an Airfix kit. Seemingly limitless enemy squadrons are presented here for your pleasure, and the whole thing rattles along in a brisk and exciting manner. Dispensing death-from-above from your P-38 cockpit was never this much fun…

Expect to pay: £50 – £75

Home conversions: None

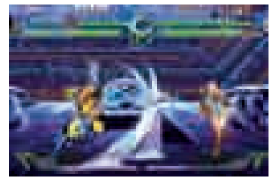


STREET FIGHTER ALPHA II (1996)

It may have been eclipsed by *Street Fighter III* and those *Capcom Vs.* games, but the *Street Fighter Alpha* series still kicks booty for those preferring the elegance of Ryu's Dragon Punch over the showiness of Wolverine's Berserker Slash from the Marvel games. The first *Street Fighter Alpha* game introduced larger character graphics than even *Street Fighter II*, and a far more precise and detailed artistic style that would be used in all of Capcom's future fighters. But *Street Fighter Alpha II* smoothed out a few of the play mechanics and is the much better game. Okay, so no one uses the new characters. But, why bother when the old ones are so perfect?

Expect to pay: £30 – £40

Home conversions: SNES, PSone, Sega Saturn, PS2, PC



X-MEN VS. STREET FIGHTER (1996)

1996 goes down in history as the year some bright spark at Capcom thought, "We've done some *Street Fighter* games and we've done an *X-Men* fighting game. Why not make them fight each other?" And so, a slew of arcade spin-offs came to be. This, the first of many Capcom *Marvel Vs.* fighters, is still arguably the best. If only for the fact that all characters, whether *Street Fighter* or *X-Men*, seem to be evenly matched without the over-the-top screen-busting super powers of future *Vs.* games. And let's face it, it doesn't get much better than beating Ken to a bloody pulp while playing as Wolverine. Even with no one manning the other controller…

Expect to pay: £40 – £50

Home conversions: PSone, Sega Saturn



DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: SHADOW OVER MYSTARA (1996)

The second of two licensed *Dungeons & Dragons* beat-'em-ups on CPS-2 (the first being *Tower Of Doom*), this is by far the most ambitious and spectacular. Up to four players can immerse themselves in this epic trawl through the realm of Mystara, as one of six different characters: cleric, fighter, dwarf, elf, magician or thief. It has incredible depth for an arcade game, with dozens of spells, items and power-ups to play with. Unfortunately, it doesn't feature any characters from the children's cartoon. No, not even the Dungeon Master or the hot girl with the furry pants.

Expect to pay: £75 – £100

Home conversions: Sega Saturn D&D Collection (Japan only), requires 4MB memory cart.



VAMPIRE SAVIOR (1997)

Vampire Savior deserves to be here for taking the excellent, original *DarkStalkers* games and making them even better, and for introducing one of Capcom's best-ever game characters, BB Hood. Less familiar than any of the *Street Fighter* or *Marvel Vs.* titles, *Vampire Savior* is one of the fastest and deepest 2D fighters ever created. It features some of the most atmospheric hand-drawn backgrounds and technically accomplished character animation of any CPS-2 title. Unfortunately, the CPS-2 board is now incredibly difficult to track down in the West.

Expect to pay: £75 – £100

Home conversions: PSone (DarkStalkers 3), Sega Saturn (Japan only, requires 4MB memory cart), Sega Dreamcast Vampire Chronicles (Japan only)

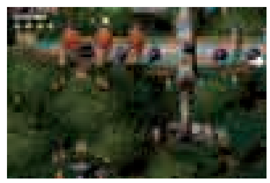


DIMAHOO (2000)

This extraordinary shoot-'em-up is the third in the *Mahou Daisakusen* (*Sorcerer Striker*) series by legendary designers Raizing. *Dimahoo* blends both old-school and modern shooter stylings with fantasy graphics. It is a hugely enjoyable game, with a difficulty pitched midway between Cave's *Progear* and the earlier *19XX*. An interesting feature is the introduction of RPG-like 'elemental' powers, where attacking an enemy or boss with an element which they are weak against will maximise your destructive capabilities. However, this is not as tied to progression as the similar system implemented in *Ikaruga*, so you can choose to ignore it if you wish and concentrate on just blowing things up.

Expect to pay: £50 – £75

Home conversions: None

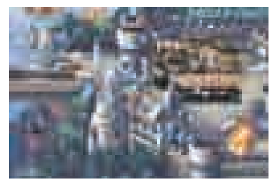


1944: THE LOOP MASTER (2000)

This shouldn't really be here, it's place should be taken by the likes of either *Mars Matrix* or *Giga Wing*, which are both better shooters from a playability point of view. But as any **Retro Gamer**-reading shmup-nut will have played those two already, we are going to talk about *1944*. Produced by Raizing, and as the last-ever game in the *1942* series, this should have been a blinder. It's actually a fairly run-of-the-mill WWII blaster with detailed but rather uninspiring graphics and isn't as playable as its exemplary predecessor. But at least you get your little wingmen back, and there are fifteen stages packed with a whole host of nasty land, sea and aerial war machine bosses to take down. Worth checking out if you enjoy the series…

Expect to pay: £50 – £75

Home conversions: None



PROGEAR NO ARASHI (2001)

The only game released by arcade shooting masters, Cave, on CPS-2, *Progear* is an incredibly frenetic side-scrolling shoot-'em-up. If you've played any of Cave's arcade output before, you'll know what to expect. If you haven't, you probably won't know what's hit you until you're staring at the 'Game Over' screen. *Progear* covers the screen with an outrageous level of intensely scary 'bullet hell' and expects you to navigate your tiny bi-plane through it all unscathed while shooting stuff down. The graphics are gorgeous, with hand-drawn artwork recalling games like the Mega Drive's *Empire Of Steel*. *Progear* is highly rewarding when you posess the skill set to get the most from it. But you'll need the patience for that to happen.

Expect to pay: £100 – £150

Home conversions: None

HONOURABLE MENTIONS

Armoured Warriors aka *Powered Gear* (very playable scrolling beat-'em-up), *Pocket Fighter* (*Street Fighter* spin-off featuring 'super-deformed' characters), *Giga Wing* (shoot-'em-up), *Mars Matrix* (shoot-'em-up), *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo* (excellent *Street Fighter*-themed puzzle game), *Cyberbots* (bonkers robot-themed 'Versus' fighting game), *Rockman 2: The Power Fighters* (odd, but strangely enjoyable *Mega Man* 'Versus' fighter), *Street Fighter Alpha 3* (final '*Alpha*' *Street Fighter*), *Marvel Vs. Capcom* (final CPS-2 'Versus' fighter).



» Capcom has made many great scrolling fighters over the years, but *Shadow Over Mystara* is arguably one of the best.

exclusive to CPS-2 were usurped in 1997 by an 'official' sequel, *Street Fighter III: New Generation*, on Capcom's newer CPS-3 hardware. Although still a 2D system, its powerful 25MHz CPU and greater memory capacity (which allowed additional RAM SIMMS to be utilised) provided superior in-game animation and speed.

But the new system was expensive and prone to technical problems. Therefore, it did not prove popular with arcade operators. Only six games, all 2D fighters, were ever produced for the CPS-3. This was a far lower number of titles than those produced for the CPS-2 hardware, which still continued to prove more cost-effective and profitable to arcade owners. The CPS-2 system's longevity was particularly notable in Southeast Asia



» *Mars Matrix* should have made our 'Ten of the best' but didn't. We're not sure why, but we're sure there's a good reason.

and Japan, where it continues to be operated frequently, even today.

In 2001, the encryption algorithm that had protected CPS-2 games for nearly a decade, was finally bypassed by the CPS2Shock group, therefore allowing unencrypted ROM images to be transcribed from the arcade boards. In spite of this, Capcom's clever security measures were, in hindsight, very successful, and the system and its games were never commercially bootlegged. The last CPS-2 title to receive a worldwide release was Cave's 'manic' shoot-'em-up *Progear no Arashi*, which was released in 2001. However, Capcom would revisit the platform for an Asia and Japan-only *Street Fighter* update, dubbed *Hyper Street Fighter II*, which was released in 2003 to celebrate its famous fighting title's tenth anniversary on the arcade system. This brought the CPS 2 story full-circle, with the game that had literally kick-started the enduring hardware's immense popularity with arcade operators and gamers alike a decade previously.



» The *Alien Vs. Predator* tie-in that proved to be a lot better than the movie, which followed ten years after the game's release.

"AS THE NINETIES WORE ON, AND THE POPULARITY OF 2D BEGAN TO WANE… CPS-2 RELEASES BECAME MORE SPORADIC"

AN ARCADE AT HOME
THE BASIC FACTS

If you'd like to play JAMMA arcade games (like those of the CPS-2 system) in the comfort of your own home there are two options. The obvious and probably most satisfying solution is to get hold of a dedicated JAMMA arcade cabinet. These come in all shapes and sizes, so be sure to choose one according to the specifications of the types of games you intend to play.

For instance, if you are going to play a lot of vertical format games such as shoot-'em-ups, as well as horizontal screen games, you'll need a turntable screen that can be set up according to your chosen game's screen format. If you intend to play a lot of fighting games, you'll probably want to opt for a six-button, dual-control cabinet to play them properly. And of course, you'll need the space and some basic technical know-how to keep your cab maintained and working reliably. You can reasonably expect to pay anything from £50 to £250 depending on your arcade cabinet's specifications and age.

The other option is a 'Supergun' harness, which allows JAMMA arcade games to be played on a standard TV (via RGB SCART) or PC monitor. Prebuilt Superguns usually include a couple of joystick control ports for dual play, and can be set up like a regular home console. They are a very respectable alternative for those lacking the space for a dedicated cabinet. A brand new prebuilt Supergun can cost anything from £75 to £200, although used ones can be picked up considerably cheaper.

Those interested in pursuing arcade collecting as a hobby should consider heading on over to the UK Video Arcade Collecting (www.ukvac.com) or JAMMA+ (jammaplus.co.uk) websites and forums. Their friendly and easy going members will be more than happy to provide useful information to newcomers to the home arcade scene, and there are also areas devoted to the very reasonably priced trading of arcade supplies and game PCBs to get you started.



» *Street Fighter Alpha 3:* Zangief uses his spinning lariet to great effect.

CAPCOM CPS-2
KNOWN GAME RELEASE CHRONOLOGY

1993
- Eco Fighters aka Ultimate Ecology
- Super Street Fighter II: The New Challengers

1994
- Alien Vs. Predator
- Dungeons & Dragons: Tower Of Doom
- Powered Gear aka Armored Warriors
- Pnickies
- Super Muscle Bomber aka Ring Of Destruction
- Super Street Fighter II Turbo
- Vampire: Night Warriors aka Darkstalkers
- X-Men: Children Of The Atom

1995
- Cyberbots
- Marvel Super Heroes
- Rockman: The Power Battle aka Mega Man
- Street Fighter Alpha aka Zero
- Vampire Hunter aka Night Warriors

1996
- 19XX: The War Against Destiny
- Dungeons & Dragons: Shadow Over Mystara
- Quiz Naneiro Dreams
- Rockman 2: The Power Fighters aka Mega Man 2
- Street Fighter Alpha aka Zero 2
- Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo
- X-Men Vs. Street Fighter
- Vampire Savior

1997
- Battle Circuit
- Capcom Sports Club
- Marvel Super Heroes Vs. Street Fighter
- Pocket Fighter aka Super Gem Fighter
- Vampire Hunter 2 aka DarkStalkers' Revenge
- Vampire Savior 2: Lord Of Vampire

1998
- Marvel Vs. Capcom
- Street Fighter Alpha 3 aka Zero 3

1999
- Giga Wing
- Jangokushi

2000
- 1944: The Loop Master
- Dimahoo aka Great Mahou Daisakusen
- Mars Matrix
- Mighty! Pang

2001
- Janpai Puzzle Choko
- Progear no Arashi
- Puzz Loop 2

2003
- Hyper Street Fighter II

遠くの稀で、エキゾチックなゲームを愛する人々のため

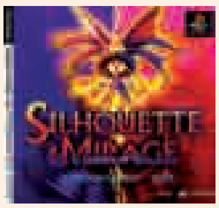
FULL OF EASTERN

A LOOK BACK AT TREASURE'S UNDERRATED YET WEIRD AND WONDERFUL SHOOT-'EM-UP

SILHOUETTE MIRAGE

Famed Japanese videogame producer Treasure is something of an enigma. Adored by the gaming 'hardcore', its output can often confuse and bewilder the casual gamer lacking the perseverance to discover the inventive and often highly entertaining aspects of its titles for themselves while many of its games fall by the wayside of any European release. Mike Bevan looks at one such underrated classic.

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** TREASURE CO. LTD/ESP

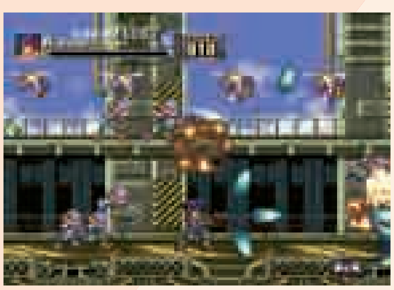
» **DEVELOPER:** IN-HOUSE

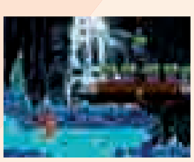
» **FEATURED HARDWARE:** PLAYSTATION

» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £15-25

» **CAN'T IMPORT? THEN WHY NOT TRY:** RAPID RELOAD (PLAYSTATION), GUARDIAN HEROES (SATURN), IKARUGA (GAMECUBE)

Due to its diverse play mechanics, we felt it was best to mention the following three titles. *Rapid Reload* (known as *Gunner's Heaven* in Japan) is an early but high-quality PlayStation homage to Treasure's classic Mega Drive run-and-gun-fest *Gunstar Heroes*. The Saturn's *Guardian Heroes* is Treasure's take on the side-scrolling beat-'em-up that also features the same impressive 2D zooming and scaling that was later used in *Silhouette Mirage*. Finally, there's the famed *Ikaruga*, which developed *Silhouette Mirage*'s colour-switching gameplay mechanics for the shoot-'em-up format.





Interesting fact
As well as the wonderful *Silhouette Mirage*, Working Designs were responsible for localising a great many RPGs and shoot-'em-ups and was known for the great sense of humour it injected into its translations. First formed in 1986, the company lasted for 19 years until its sad demise in 2005.



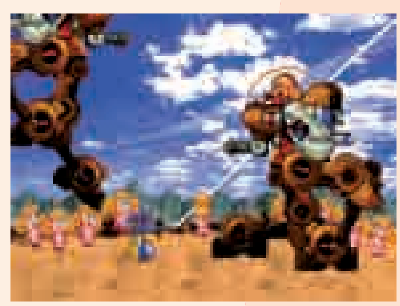
» Shyna – our bicoloured protagonist, complete with her flappy, flying hat.

メガ駆動機構

So you think you know videogaming? Well, have you ever been vomited on by a hyper-excited bouncing frog? Or taken part in a boss fight in which you don't attack the boss directly, but his soup? What about battling with an enormous airborne flower-obsessed fish with the eerily grinning head of a 14-year-old girl? All of the above, and much more, can be yours in the weird and wonderful world of *Silhouette Mirage*.

You are Shyna, the pint-sized Messenger of Justice, on a crucial mission to restore order to the Edo Computer System. This HAL-like entity has malfunctioned in a disturbingly schizophrenic manner, splitting the denizens of a surreal post-apocalyptic world into two opposing, but equally malevolent factions: 'Silhouette' and 'Mirage'. Hey! See what Treasure has done there? Luckily, Shyna, resplendent in her cute flappy hat is equipped with powers of both the Silhouettes and the Mirages (more on this later), and is the only being between here and doomsday capable of either restoring order, or putting a stop to whatever it is these bipolar miscreants are planning to do. Actually, *Silhouette Mirage*'s plot is so convoluted that after all these years, even with the help of the translated PlayStation version we still don't have a clue what's going on. But hey, it's all part of the fun.

Silhouette Mirage combines the very enjoyable platform run-and-gun gameplay of Treasure's previous *Gunstar Heroes*, with the same kind of innovative and thought-provoking 'light' and 'dark' mechanics seen in the company's later cult shoot-'em-up *Ikaruga*.

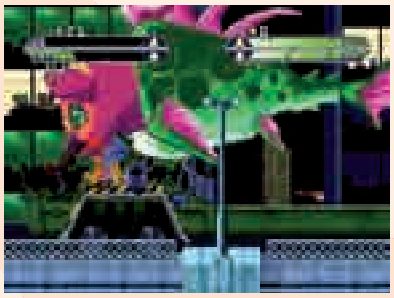


» Mirages like to pilot AT-STs. Shame they're rubbish at it.

GAMES FROM THE EAST WHICH NEVER MADE IT TO UK SOIL

N PROMISE


» Zohar, your nemesis, who also has Silhouette and Mirage powers.


» Fish-girl on the rampage. Be afraid… Be very afraid.

Indeed this is the game in which this system first originated. The Shyna character literally has two sides – one blue and one red – depending on which direction she is facing. Each side represents the attributes of either Silhouette or Mirage respectively, and this will influence the colour of the bullets you fire. To dispose of an enemy you need to make sure your bullets are of the opposite colour to them before shooting – otherwise you're not going to see an awful lot happen. For example, to destroy the Mirage enemies (who are red) you will need to align to your Silhouette attribute (which is blue), and vice versa.

This is all complicated by the fact that your attribute will change depending on whether you are facing (or moving) left or right, so you obviously can't just go around mindlessly blasting everything and anything you see; you are forced to think about it depending on which side of the screen the bad guys are on. Attributes can also be changed via a brief transformation sequence by pressing a separate button on the pad, which will cause Shyna's red/blue colours to be mirrored. So, if you were facing right and were red, you will now be blue and when you face left you will be red again. Got it? Imagine what it's like when you're actually playing it.

Although hitting an adversary with the wrong attribute fire power won't actually damage it, you'll drain its 'spirit', which may reduce its capacity to fire at you. Shyna herself possesses a spirit gauge, which is basically an indication of shot power, but also governs her use of a 'Parasite bomb' and her ability to switch attributes via her transformation. Collisions with same-type attribute enemy bullets deplete this while opposite-attribute projectiles cause you physical damage and lead to your ultimate demise. You can attempt to counter this unfortunate scenario with the second very inventive concept in *Silhouette Mirage*. This is the ability to bounce enemy fire back and destroy its originator by holding down the 'reflect attack' button, which creates a 'shield' around Shyna in the direction she is facing. For this to work you have to be aligned to the same colour attribute as the attacker's bullets. This system adds an extra level of experimentation and depth to the game as the player figures out the optimum strategic balance of offensive (with standard weapons) and counter-defensive (with reflect attacks) measures needed during play. Indeed some boss characters can only be destroyed by using a mixture of these two techniques.

To begin with, most of the Silhouettes you encounter are in the form of little pumpkin-headed creatures. Shoot them with the 'right' bullets or reflect back their fire and their heads fall off revealing a tiny candle underneath. Mirages come in the form of cute little curly haired Cupie Dolls, with a rather disturbing dark side. Both factions possess a distinct personality of their own, at the same time comical and rather surreal, and both seem to enjoy packing a rather alarming amount of fire power and releasing it in your general direction.

Luckily, as well as the techniques already mentioned, Shyna has a whole slew of close-combat moves available to her, including the ability to grab, punch and hurl enemies across the screen, and the 'cash-bash' attack that allows you to divest the contents of enemy wallets for personal gain. Very handy, as cash is essential in order to upgrade your fire power. There are seven different weapons available in the game, from standard straight-firing bullets to homing lasers and 'boomerang' shots. Some are very novel and a lot of fun to unleash on your unwitting adversaries. Obtaining them is achieved by dropping in at small stalls along the way, and purchasing new weapons from an enterprising rabbit. Like you do.

Silhouette Mirage's world is jam-packed with touches of wackiness, which are thoroughly entertaining and above all, very Japanese. The game flows in a similar manner to Treasure's side-scrolling brawler *Guardian Heroes*, throwing in lots of text-heavy cut-scenes to evolve the plot and dividing progression through each of its seven stages into lots of little sub-sections, each requiring you to defeat a certain number of on-screen baddies or a set-piece boss before moving on. And, in typical Treasure style the bosses themselves do not disappoint. We've mentioned a few of the most memorable, but be certain, from a cast of around twenty very unique guardians, ranging from the laughable to the ridiculously sublime, many of *Silhouette Mirage*'s bosses are certain to remain etched on your memory long after you have encountered them. Even though you spend a lot of your time battling bosses, they are all so varied, original and full of character that these sequences never seem drawn out, as in other platform action games we could mention. In fact, given that defeating each boss is equally a matter of brain as well as brawn, more cerebral players will probably find these encounters the most enjoyable part of the game.

Sadly, the original Sega Saturn version of the game never made it out of Japan, but the game was ported to the Sony PlayStation and later released in America by Working Designs on its 'Spaz' twitch-gaming label. While there is little noticeable difference between the two releases, some may cite minor cosmetic differences, such as the PlayStation edition's lack of certain background layers, as being a reason to plump for the original, that is, if you are not bothered about the English translation. The US translation does score points for allowing the player to save between levels, but for some unknown reason Working Designs saw fit to tamper with Treasure's original game balance by upping both the overall difficulty level and the cost of some of the better weapons, making it more frustrating at times than the Japanese release.

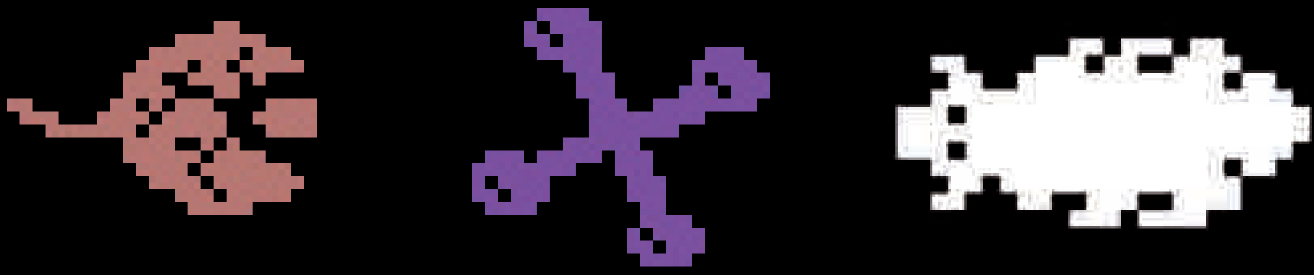
Whichever version of the game you decide to import, however, it's still more than worthwhile doing so. *Silhouette Mirage* is a unique 2D gaming experience and although it's not one of the most accessible titles in Treasure's back-catalogue, it's definitely one of the most rewarding if you are prepared to give it the time and patience it deserves.


» A crazy robot-armed chauffeur boss, who you'll fight on top of this limo.

私を読み、私に書くことができ、私に知らせれば好みのゲームはある

THE MAKING OF...

SHEEP IN SPACE



What happens when you cross a sheep with a seminal scrolling shooter? Paul Drury seeks a punch line with coding legend Jeff Minter and discovers much about woolly quadrupeds, both real and pixelated

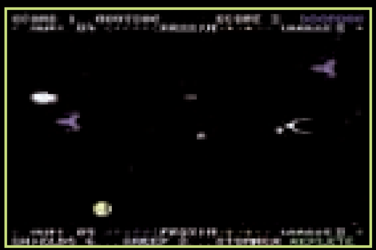
We start by making a farm boy error. "No, no, it isn't Flossie. I wrote it five years before I knew Flossie, before she came into my life," Jeff Minter explains, referring to the favourite of his flock and the second most famous sheep in the world after Dolly. We've found Jeff and his coding partner Giles in an Oxford pub during this year's Retrovision event – a gathering of folk with a shared love of Llamasoft games and extended opening hours – to talk about the creation of an obscure shooter from 1984 and I've got the name of the ovine hero wrong. I feel suitably sheepish.

Thankfully, Jeff is in his element when talking about his woolly friends. "I'd been fond of sheep for years, but at that stage I was living with my parents and they just didn't have enough land. One of the main reasons that I moved to Wales in 1987 was that land was cheap enough to keep sheep!"

Jeff grins and wipes a little bit of Guinness froth from his moustache. Indeed, *Sheep In Space* brought together two of his great passions – sheepkind and the works of Eugene Jarvis. "I wanted to do a *Defender*-style game but not a direct clone," says Jeff. "I had this idea of two planets; one above the other, with opposing gravity, and your speed was controlled by how far you were above the surface. At first, I was going to have a spaceship that flipped as it went through the gravity zones but I thought, no, I want to do my beastie stuff. I needed a character in there so I thought of an interstellar space sheep. A bit surreal? Well, my previous game had multi-footed laser spitting death camels in it, so it seemed quite natural."

"He has a twisted mind", winks Giles. Clearly. But Jeff also had a conscience and *Sheep In Space* can be seen as an apology on two levels. First to Eugene, as the previous time Jeff had visited *Defender*-territory with *Andes Attack*, the result had been less than revelatory. More fundamentally though, this was his way of saying sorry for his prior offerings; where animals had been cast as the enemy.

"With *Attack Of The Mutant Camels*, you had to shoot them but I really like camels, so in *Revenge Of The Mutant Camels*, I made them the heroes," says Jeff. "In *Sheep In Space*, there are statues of them on the surface and if you shot them, it would register how many times, and take off 106 points for each



» Where's the nearest service station?



» Llamasoft's digital zoo…



» Is that really a sheep or a giant bug?

hit at the end of the level. The 106 comes from the first time I went to America, when Hewson was releasing *Gridrunner* over there. There was this radio station in San Francisco called KMEL 106 FM and their logo was this flying camel. Excellent! The DJs always sounded really stoned and they played my kind of music. I remember staying in my hotel room, listening to them play Pink Floyd's *The Final Cut* for the very first time. I went back [to San Francisco] recently, and it's now a rap station. Noooooo!"

You can see Jeff's interpretation of the once great station's camel logo floating alongside a menagerie of odd creatures in *Sheep*. Bouncing dogoids, flying Bactrians and especially vicious evil eyes ("they were inspired by the Illuminates' *Eye In The Pyramid*") all threaten to destroy your plucky Sheepoid. Players will also notice a well-horned goat scuttling along the planet surface, which would, in true Minter fashion, be elevated to hero status in his subsequent release, *Ancipital*. But what about the big-nosed bloke that wobbles with the animals? Is that you Jeff? "No!", he protests, while scratching his reasonably sized conk self-consciously. "If you shoot him and look at the graphic of when he stands up, you'll see a Greek symbol on his chest. He was my own version of PiMan: SigMan!"

Among all these creature discomforts though, your main foes remain alien. The loopy plot involves a dastardly attack by the Zzyaxians, who have installed Planet Buster destructor guns between the parallel planets, and sent Robot Droids to steal energy from the local power stations to build up a devastating surge which will cause the delicately balanced ecosystems to explode. The human inhabitants logically decide that their best means of defence is to genetically modify sheep and send their lunch out to save them. Don't you miss games with believable back-stories?

All this entertaining nonsense boils down to some surprisingly strategic blasting. The initial frenetic firing, as your lonely Sheepoid dispatches adversaries in the central, fast-moving section of the screen, gives way to focused pursuits of Hoverchargers, which are surreptitiously pushing your planets towards destruction.

"You've got to get the gravity right to shoot those little bastards", chuckles Jeff. "As you went into the planets' gravity, your bullets would curve, and that became a key part of the gameplay. I was doodling with a sprite editor and realised that as your bombs were spinning, they looked just like a dog biscuit. So that's what they became – Bonios of Doom!"

Ah, the thrill of the chase. Mastering the art of launching a Bonio at just the right height from the surface, and watching it curve majestically into a fleeing droid, moments before it delivered its charge, was supremely satisfying. Yet prolonged, drawn-out pursuits of these powered-up adversaries would see them suddenly start behaving in the most erratic way.

"Do you know the baiter trick in *Defender*?" says Jeff, leaning over conspiratorially. "They swarm after you and there's a place where they suddenly



» A couple of the multi-footed laser-spitting death camels make a cameo appearance.

IN THE KNOW



» **PUBLISHER:** LLAMASOFT
» **DEVELOPER:** JEFF MINTER
» **RELEASED:** 1984
» **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
» **EXPECT TO PAY:** £10

DEVELOPER HIGHLIGHTS

REVENGE OF THE MUTANT CAMELS
SYSTEMS: C64, AMIGA, ATARI ST
YEAR: 1984

TEMPEST 3000
SYSTEMS: NUON
YEAR: 2000

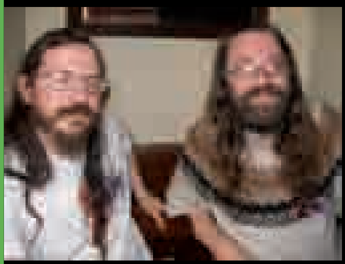
SPACE GIRAFFE
SYSTEMS: XBOX 360
YEAR: 2007



"AFTER PUTTING LASER-SPITTING DEATH CAMELS IN A GAME, INTERSTELLAR SPACE SHEEP SEEMED QUITE NATURAL" JEFF ON LOGICAL CHARACTER DESIGN

THE MAKING OF…

SHEEP IN SPACE



» Jeff (right) and Giles at Retrovision. A dozen empty Guinness glasses just out of shot.



» The 'lovely' cover art by Steinar Lund.

WHERE SOFTIES MAY SAFELY GRAZE

If supping Guinness with Jeff Minter and enjoying all manner of retro goodness (not just Llamasoft's glorious back catalogue) sounds like a pleasant way to spend a weekend in Oxford, you should visit www.retrovision.org.uk and book tickets for the tenth gathering, planned for February 2008. The events, borne of the yakyak.org forums, are organised by Mark Rayson, a thoroughly decent bloke and a dead ringer for Ming The Merciless, when he's got his slap on. He not only provided all the images for this piece, he is the only chap we know who has completed all 48 levels of *Sheep In Space*. Respect due.



» Mark Rayson rallies the Retrovision massive.

turn round and go in the opposite direction. It's because there's a line where the screen wraps over from 0 to 255 and if you're on the right side of it, they stop and go all the way round the world to try and get you, rather than going directly for you. That's what the enemies do in *Sheep* for the same reason. I left that in as a nod to *Defender*. Plus it just makes it more interesting."

It wasn't the only tip of the hat to Jeff's inspiration. Failing to prevent the Planet Busters reaching a charge of five, sees your mission going distinctly pear-shaped. Yet even with your planets gone and you thrown into free space, your situation is not quite as desperate as it is in *Defender*.

"It is survivable", Jeff tries to assure us. "Because the sprites are split into three different zones – that was the only clever thing that I was doing really, using faster interrupts to multiplex sprites – enemies will cluster in them and you're almost safe in between those zones. You can kind of get around them and shoot them from behind. It's definitely a lot easier than planet loss in *Defender*. I remember Tony Takeshi [famed games hack from back in the day] was round my house and I was demoing *Sheep*. I lost my planets and he said, 'I'll kiss your ass if you survive this!' I did… though I didn't hold him to it…"

So, the gaming world was denied a memorable photo opportunity, but was left with a slick, scrolling shooter that wasn't slavishly copying its source. *Sheep* also differed by introducing the concept of refuelling, though this manifested itself in typical Minter fashion. Among the industrial zones and long stretches of sea that made up the planets' landscapes were pockets of green pasture, where your Sheepoid could land and graze peacefully to replenish its shields and attend to its rumbling belly. *Sheep* didn't feature a traditional 'health bar', mind. Instead, your sheep's stomach was described in such quaintly, old-fashioned English terms as 'peckish', 'famished' and 'replete.'

"I'm a bit of a word w*nker", says Jeff. "I used to read dictionaries as a kid and I'm still fascinated by the English language. I got a wonderful tome on linguistics from the Hay Book Festival. It was in the bog for ages."

Sheep is full of such charming touches. The pastoral calm as your Sheepoid munches on fresh grass while ominous clouds of aliens gather above; the deeply personal scrolling message that accompanies the title screen; and the beautifully arranged score.

"I'd done little tunes myself for games, but they always sounded horrible. When the C64 arrived with the power to do three-part harmonies, I got an old friend that I'd gone to primary school with called James Lisney to do the arrangements. He went on to be a concert pianist. The first he'd done



» The title screen, complete with clever sprite mirroring and a long message to us all…

> "I'VE GOT IDEAS ABOUT HOW SHEEP IN SPACE COULD BE DONE ON XBOX LIVE ARCADE. I'D LOVE TO REVISIT ANCIPITAL TOO" JEFF ON BRINGING THE BEAST OUT ON THE 360



» The Planet Buster gun and the green, green grass of home.



» Jeff hums along to a bit of Bach…



» The first Llamasoft newsletter, declaring the arrival of the mighty *Sheep In Space*.



» Whoops, there goes the neighbourhood. Next stop, Free Space…

for me was *Egyptian Sand Dance* for *RMC* and for *Sheep*… well, it was Bach's *Sheep May Safely Graze*."

We all raise our glasses and toast this sweet little shooter, which is something of a forgotten gem, sandwiched as it was, between the far better known *RMC* and *Ancipital*, in what was an impressively prolific period for Llamasoft. Jeff bemoans the fact that he can no longer code a game from start to finish in a mere two months. Then, after taking another long gulp of the black stuff, he brings the pleasant reminiscing bang up-to-date.

"You know, I've got some ideas about how I could revisit that design with 3D tech. There was something I did in *Unity* [Jeff's stalled GameCube project], this side-scrolling portion, like a 3D tube, which had gravity at the top and bottom acting on you as you flew between these two surfaces. I was thinking you could do something similar with *Sheep In Space*. As it's a cylinder, as well as going up and down you could rotate the tube and move over different areas, if you see what I mean. It could be rather nice…'

The thought of interstellar sheep flying proudly on Xbox Live Arcade sends me rushing excitedly back to the bar, but before I can stand up, Jeff warms me with one last bit of nostalgia.

"One of the things I remember most fondly about *Sheep* is that it was the first game where we had decent artwork on the cover. We met this guy, Steinar Lund, at a gameshow and he came round with a portfolio. I was like, "Fu*king hell, this guy is amazing!" He did that wonderful sheep's head and I've still got the photographs he did of sheep to work from. A few years ago, he gave me the original artwork for my birthday and it's up in Giles's room. Then last summer, we rescued a ram lamb that was going to be slaughtered and he looks exactly like the one in *Sheep In Space*.'

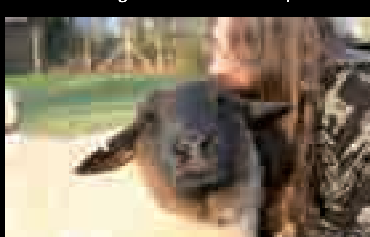
"Ah, you mean Butterbean!", exclaims Giles and we're back where we started, with the two animal lovers cooing over the latest addition to their family.

Which leaves us hoping, dear readers, that regardless of whether woolly mammals are your thing, you might seek out this mint blaster. It also happens to be my all-time favourite game, so I conclude by thanking its creator in the time-honoured fashion.

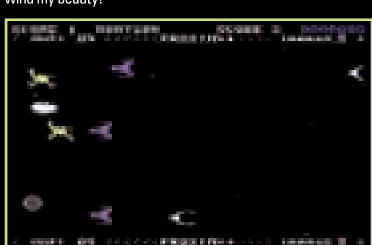
"Cheers", says Jeff, as he reaches for another Guinness.



» Our hungry hero stops to graze on some grass.



» Jeff: "Watch out for the SigMen on Level 9. Now fly like the wind my beauty!"



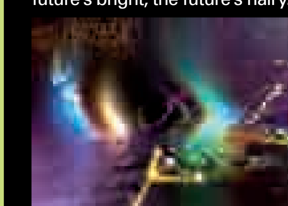
» "Oh no… I think I'm in trouble here."



» Our heroic sheepoid ruminates on how to best deal with the aliens above.

NEW LLAMASOFT, OLD BEASTIES

"As you can see, Llamasoft has doubled in size", says Jeff. "Giles and I are a team. We spark ideas together and he feeds me with technology that I can use. I'm shit at maths and he's a genius!" Giles smiles modestly. "We work in parallel. Jeff will say he needs some monster to work in a certain way and I say, 'Okay, it's a mathematical problem.' A few weeks later I say, 'Hey, I've got a function for you!'" The first fruit of their partnership is the dazzling *Space Giraffe*, which you should be playing on your 360 by the time you read this. Now the pair have got to grips with the development environment, expect plenty more esoteric titles to appear on Xbox Live Arcade. "Like I've said, I've got ideas about how *Sheep In Space* could be done and I'd love to revisit *Ancipital* one day. '*Cippy*' is just excellent," enthuses Jeff. The future's bright, the future's hairy.



RETRORATED



While the 50/60 HZ debate continues, Nintendo simply concentrates on releasing as many Virtual Console games as possible. There's over 100 titles available now, so our guide to the latest releases should now more usuful than ever.

WAVERACE64

INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **COST:** 1,000 POINTS
- » **60HZ** OPTIMISED

Hooray, we finally have a PAL version of *Waverace* that does this excellent game justice. While the large borders remain in this game, they are nowhere near as terrible as in the original title's PAL outing. We should also point out that the frame rate is also far more stable, and if you add in some high-resolution textures, *Waverace 64* is now looking even better than ever before.

Of course, there are many who will argue that the old game was brilliant despite all of those original 50Hz problems, but it's certainly nice to play *Waverace* as Nintendo originally intended.

There may not be a significant number of tracks and character available, but the fantastic water physics will soon help you forget about this minor niggle. Fighting against the frightfully realistic elements as you learn the beautifully designed courses is what *Waverace 64* is all about – hell, it's what *Waverace 64* has always been about. And it is testament to the original game's brilliance that the GameCube sequel was nowhere near as challenging or satisfying to play. An utterly superb racer that should be owned by everyone.





PAPER MARIO

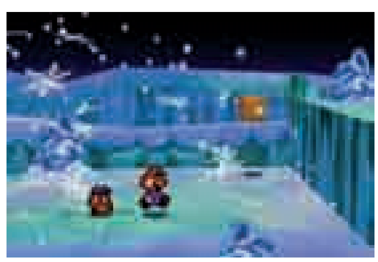
INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **COST.** 1,000 POINTS
- » **60HZ** OPTIMISED

The Nintendo 64 releases may continue to be drip-fed to us, but at least we're getting some absolutely cracking titles to enjoy, as *Paper Mario* proves. This humorous little RPG from Intelligent Systems is arguably one of the biggest releases on the Virtual Console, mainly because it came out so late in N64's life that few gamers got to play it.

Featuring utterly stunning visuals (the world Mario inhabits is made of paper) a glorious soundtrack from Yuka "*Fire Emblem*" Tsujiyoko and a script that's a funny as it is smart, *Paper Mario* is quite simply one of the best downloads so far and easily worth the 1,000-point asking price. Granted, £7.50 sounds a fair amount of cash to splash out on a digital download, but when you consider that the original can sell for as much as £50 it's an absolute bargain. Achingly funny, with a simple but surprisingly deep combat system, *Paper Mario* is a real classic that deserves to be in every Wii owner's collection. Miss it at your peril.









ACT RAISER

INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** SQUARE ENIX
- » **COST:** 800 POINTS
- » **60 HZ:** NO

Okay, so the town-building sections are worryingly simplistic and the hack-and-slash levels don't look quite as good as we remember but *Act Raiser* remains a brilliant little title that's well worth its 800-point asking price.

With its subtle blend of strategy and simple hacking and slashing, *Act Raiser* stands apart from practically every other Virtual Console title that's currently available and is a welcome change to the many platformers that are starting to clog the download service.

The expansive, orchestral score still sounds absolutely terrific, the bosses remain as tough as they ever were and the Mode 7 effects still manage to impress. This is a must own title.



ALEX KIDD IN THE ENCHANTED CASTLE



INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **COST:** 800 POINTS
- » **60 HZ:** NO

***The Enchanted Castle* was never all that when it was first released, and now, some 18 years after its original release, it's not so much 'mighty tired' as 'totally comatose'.**

Incredibly dull to pay through and with a colour palette that's almost as annoying as its main character, *Alex Kidd In The Enchanted Castle* is one of the worst platformers that's currently available on the Virtual Console, and considering some of the games on there, that's pretty worrying.

The plodding pace, simplistic level design and ugly sprites ruin the game, and when you consider that it's already possibly to download the likes of *Super Mario World*, *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* and *Kid Chameleon, Alex Kidd*'s fate is finally sealed.

DEVIL'S CRUSH

INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** HUDSON
- » **COST:** 600 POINTS
- » **60 HTZ:** YES

While we're pleased that *Devil's Crush* is finally available on the Virtual Console, we're a bit gutted that we've ended up with the PC-Engine version and not the superior Mega Drive outing.

The music may be tinnier, but the gameplay and ball physics are as good as ever, and ultimately that's what really matters. There may only be one main table, but it's three screens high, is filled with a variety of ghoulish creatures to destroy and boasts several mini-tables to discover. Then there's the fantastic soundtrack that perfectly matches the on-screen action and just goes on and on forever. It may not be the greatest pinball game ever made, but it's certainly the greatest you'll find on VC and that's good enough for us.





SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2

INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **COST:** 800 POINTS
- » **60 HZ:** NO

Unfortunately for Nintendo, *Sonic The Hedgehog 2* was released around about the same time as Xbox Live Arcade's *Sonic The Hedgehog*, and it really highlights the differences between the two services. While Sonic zips around like a hedgehog possessed in Microsoft's recent offering, the 50Hz VC outing feels like Sonic and Tails are being forced to run through thick treacle while wearing cement shoes (now there's an idea).

Of course, it's still a brilliant platformer, and original PAL gamers won't spot any issues at all, but for anyone else, it just highlights how archaic some aspects of the Virtual Console are. Let's hope Nintendo sees sense and offers the ability to download both 50 and 60Hz options. That way everyone is happy.





RETRORATED



STREETS OF RAGE II

INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **COST:** 800 POINTS
- » **60HZ:** NO

***Streets Of Rage II* is seen by many gamers as the greatest scrolling fighter of all time, and after spending an entire weekend playing through it again, it's hard to disagree.**

Pretty much everything about this sequel has been refined to perfection and the end result is a genuinely astonishing beat-'em-up. The graphics are much more impressive and boast greater animation as well as allowing more enemies on screen. The funky techno soundtrack continues to amaze, and the slow smart bomb from the original game has been dropped in favour of *Final Fight*-style special attacks and there are now four different characters to choose from. *Streets Of Rage II* is crying out for an online option so that you can play your with mates online, but otherwise this game is the beat-'em-up equivalent of Mary Poppins – "practically perfect in every way".



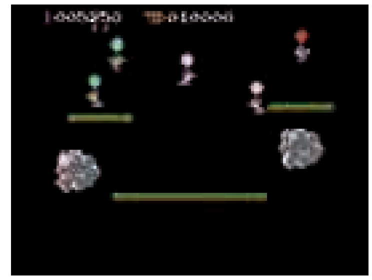
BALLOON FIGHT

INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **COST:** 500 POINTS
- » **60HZ:** NO

If you're disappointed that *Joust* is unlikely to appear on the Virtual Console any time soon, take solace in the fact you can enjoy *Balloon Fight* instead. Trading a knight on an ostrich for a boy held aloft by two balloons, *Balloon Fight* is essentially the same game, but has been with that typical Nintendo touch.

Each single-screen level features a set number of penguins (also suspended on balloons) and the aim of the game is to simply pop their balloons before they manage to do the same to you. Like all the best games, it's deceptively easy to pick up, but incredibly hard to put down, and it's as addictive as hell. For 500 points it's an absolute steal.





GALAGA 90

INFORMATION

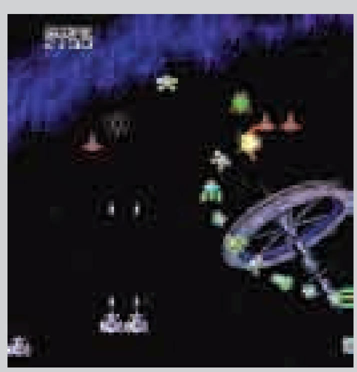
- » **PUBLISHER:** NEC
- » **COST:** 600 POINTS
- » **60HZ:** YES

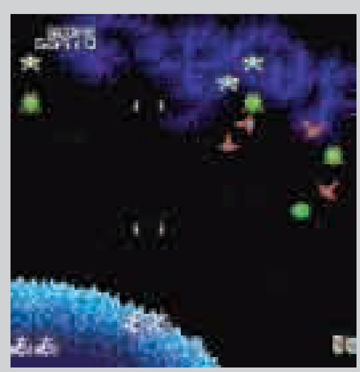
Forget the terribly sluggish NES version of *Galaga* that was released a few months back; this is the game that you should be downloading. Arguably the greatest title in the *Galaxian* franchise, *Galaga '90* is sheer gaming ecstasy and remains an incredibly addictive blaster.

Straying ever so slightly from the original *Galaxian* formula, *Galaga '90* features prettier visuals, far more challenging attack waves and even alternate level routes. This means that it is going to take a fair while before you witness all its different endings, so replay value is guarenteed.

Other nice touches include an assortment of weird and wacky bosses (which can be surprisingly tough to beat), some extremely bouncy music and even a few scrolling sections.

If only there was an option in place on the Virtual Console so that it was possible to save your best scores online. We'd love to show everybody how good we are. Maybe we'll just run a competition in next month's issue…





GOLDEN AXE II

INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **COST:** 800 POINTS
- » **60HZ:** NO



The Japanese videogames behemoth Sega certainly has a considerable number of releases coming out for the Virtual Console at the moment. While a couple of genuine classics are making appearances on the scene, the majority of the games being made available are average to say the least. Take Sega's *Golden Axe II,* for example. Bar a couple of graphical changes, a new magic system and some admittedly stunning tunes, this is effectively *Golden Axe* all over again. Decidedly old hat and about as generic as they come, *Golden Axe II*, like many other Sega Virtual Console offerings, is already available to play on the brilliant *Sega Mega Drive Compilation* for both the PlayStation 2 and the PlayStation Portable, so there's really no need to squander six of your well-earned pounds on it here when you can get it with 30 other games for around only a tenner more.

DRAGON SPIRIT

INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** NEC
- » **COST:** 600 POINTS
- » **60HZ:** YES



It would appear that we are not the only ones who like our shoot-'em-ups as there is now a healthy selection to choose from, and unsurprisingly the majority are PC-Engine titles. Unlike many other shooters that are currently available on the service, *Dragon Spirit* has you playing a large flying dragon rather than the more standard spaceship. Soaring over several prehistoric landscapes, you're required to do nothing more than toast the countryside with your fiery breath and take out the increasingly tough bosses that appear at the end of each stage. As with *Xevious*, you can bomb ground enemies and shoot down aerial invaders, but unlike *Xevious*, your dragon gains more heads as he powers up. A solid, if rather unspectacular shmup.

THE STORY OF THOR

INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **COST:** 800 POINTS
- » **60HZ:** NO

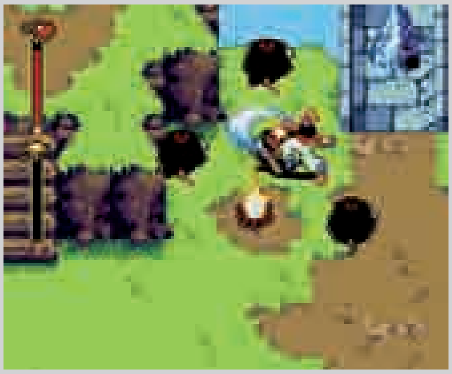
The Virtual Console is really short on decent arcade adventures at the moment, so it's great to see that the greatly underrated *The Story of Thor* is standing shoulder to shoulder with Zelda in the greatly neglected genre. Released fairly late in the Mega Drive's life, *The Story Of Thor* is an aesthetic delight that boasts beautifully animated sprites, a superb soundtrack by Yuzo Koshiro (the genius behind the *Streets Of Rage* and *Revenge of Shinobi* soundtracks) and lush looking locations that are just begging to be explored.

While your main character starts off with little more than a dagger and a natty head-band, you're soon able to use a recently discovered magical armlet to summon a variety of spirits whose powers grant you access to otherwise inaccessible areas.

The armlet can also be used to cast devastating spells, but the most satisfying aspect of *The Story Of Thor* is its wonderfully rich combat system that helps it stand apart from the entire *Zelda* franchise. Your youthful hero has a surprising amount of different moves at his disposal, and as the game progresses he's able to pull off some spectacular combos that let him make short work of his foes.

RPG fans may find it a little light and terribly linear, but this is an essential download for those looking for a solid ten-hour arcade adventure.





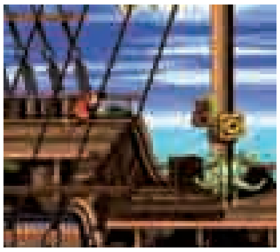
DONKEY KONG COUNTRY 2: DIDDY KONG'S QUEST

INFORMATION

- » **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO
- » **COST:** 800 POINTS
- » **60HZ:** OPTIMISED

It's unusual for a sequel to notably improve on its successor, but that's exactly what happened with Rare's follow-up to *Donkey Kong Country.* With Donkey now captured by the evil King K Rool, it was up to Diddy and newcomer Dixie to save the day and restore balance to Ape Island.

Just like its superb predecessor, *Donkey Kong Country 2* features outstandingly good visuals, a selection of new animal friends to ride and use as well as plenty of new team moves for the two apes to discover. That's not all though. Each and every level (of which there are over 50) is a thing of beauty and are so well designed that you'll have no problems replaying them, there's a selection of fun mini-games to enjoy and the bosses prove immensely satisfying to beat. Another excellent platformer to come from Rare, let's hope the third outing isn't too far away.



REVIEW

WORMS: OPEN WARFARE 2

WE'VE GOT WORMS



- SYSTEM: PSP, DS
- PRICE: £34.99
- RELEASED: AUGUST 2007
- PUBLISHER: THQ
- DEVELOPER: TEAM17
- PLAYERS: 1 (1-2 ONLINE)



I may be alone here but personally, I love my worms to do the fighting and a mouse to do my barking. Andy Davidson's annelids took a giant leap last year in the form of *Open Warfare* on the PSP and DS, marking a really good stab at handheld worm massacring. Joining a company of 16 games, split over a several platforms and even the odd genre too, *Worms: Open Warfare 2* parachutes into **Retro Gamer** Towers, smashes through our window and lands safely into Darran's Pot Noodle. I'm happy to report it didn't lose many health points on the landing either, although sadly, much to Darran's annoyance, the same couldn't be said for the Pot Noodle.

I won't waste reading time de-tailing (geddit?) the premise of *Worms*, it is simply angular warfare, but with soil-munchers; and it's a weenie-war that's looking better than ever. A new engine and fully 32-bit supportive textures have taken years off the little guys, along with the game's beautiful, animated backdrops, which now interact with the skirmishes. And its fantastically over-the-top soundtrack, which is bunkered down into the game's war roots, only adds to the tension of its simple gameplay.

One aspect of this new incarnation, that had us high-fiving like *Top Gun* pilots, is the chance to indulge in a spot of online dueling with your platoon. As if that's not a good enough reason to make this an essential purchase, it also comes packed with a rather nifty, if somewhat brutish, construction kit, allowing you to squander your hours crafting deformable warzones to playtest and decimate.

Unfortunately, the game is plagued by a necessary evil; it has a tendency to be a bit fiddly, which unfortunately, has more to do with the nature of the PSP than the game itself. With the itsy-sprites battling against an equally tiny canvas, scanning for them using the shoulder buttons to zoom in and out, and navigating using the analogue slider, feels a bit of a battle. Couple this with its inventory of wacky weaponry requiring a button press and the D-pad to navigate, means that immediate feel of the PC incarnations is sadly lost in translation – hopefully the DS version will make use of its stylus and put this right.





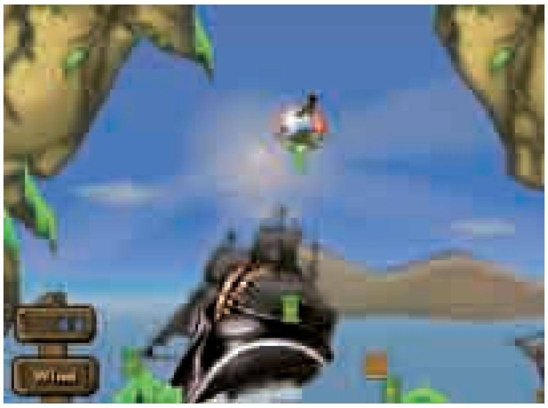
» Yes it's another version of *Worms*, but when it's done this well you can't help but fall in love with it all over again.





» As always, wind plays an important factor in the game, so make sure you check it properly before firing off a missile.







OPINION

It seems to be popular opinion, these days, that *Worms* has run its course. 'Nonsense!' I say. I've played the Live Arcade version more than any other 360 game and, judging by the number of people I've played against, I'm not the only one. And with loads of new weapons, new gameplay modes and online support, *Open Warfare 2* is probably the best version of *Worms* yet. Ignore the cynics, this is great stuff.

Ashley Day

IN SUMMARY

Sitting with a mug of tea, to help restore the old grey matter, puts me in the perfect mood for a few hours of *Worms*. So until Sony release a cup holder for the PSP, this latest offering proves palpable enough.

RATING 90%



OPINION

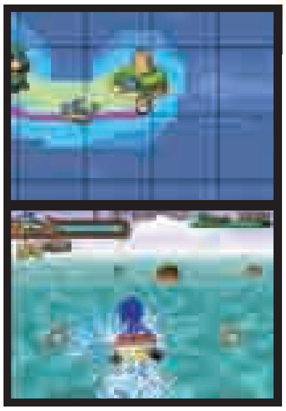
Now this is what we like to see, a sequel that improves dramatically on the original game. Cynics may well say that essentially remaking the same game for over 17 years is bound to eventually result in a perfect product, but they're probably just miserable because they don't have the required handheld to play this excellent game on. While the PSP version looks lovely, the DS outing is far more intuitive and makes surprisingly good use of both screens. A brilliant update.

Darran Jones

» WHO SAYS HEDGEHOGS CAN'T RIDE JET SKIS

SONIC RUSH ADVENTURE

SONIC MAKES A SPLASH



- » **SYSTEM:** NINTENDO DS
- » **PRICE:** £29.99
- » **RELEASED:** SEPTEMBER
- » **PUBLISHER:** SEGA
- » **PLAYERS:** 1 (1-2 ONLINE)



It was great news to hear that Sonic and Mario were doing a Rocky and Apollo for the run-up to the 2008 Olympics. But in the name of fair play, may I suggest that the Olympic governing body consider introducing tap-fitting, leak prevention and stopcock locating to the list of sporting events, just to ensure poor old Mario gets the chance to add some gold medals to his mound of gold coins.

Anyway, in preparation for this event, Mario has been keeping fit in *Mario Strikers*, and Sonic has been seen stretching his legs on a few Nintendo adventures of late, with his latest being a sequel to the rather brilliant *Sonic Rush*.

While having the word 'adventure' sitting in its title might cause some *Sonic* purists to curl up into the foetal position. Rest assured, it's an aspect which is used for moniker purposes only, and not for justifying mountainous lines of dialogue or superfluous missions about helping a fishing-cat retrieve his pet frog.

After a lengthy intro about Sonic and Tails landing on an island inhabited by comma-loving animals, and setting the scene for a slightly outlandish plot about collecting stones for Tails to build boats with, the game eventually shifts gear and surges into familiar territories.

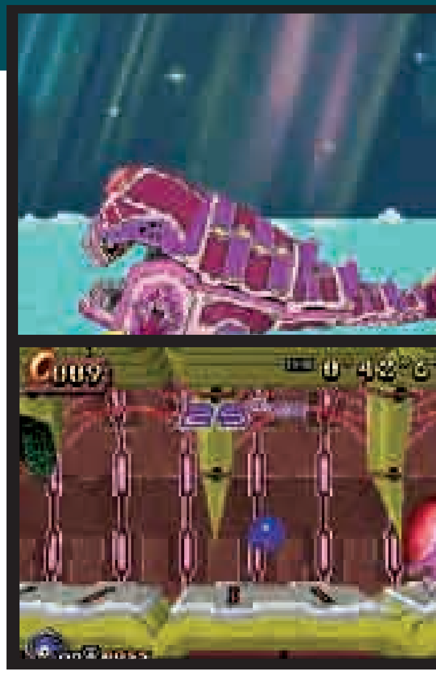
Completing each zone earns Sonic precious rocks, which Tails can use (don't ask me how) to manufacture Jet Skis, submarines and flamethrower-mounted pirate ships. The DS stylus is used to plot your journey, by drawing your route on screen you steer your vessel across the water and reach the various island zones to locate more of these stones, build better ships and progress further through the game.



» This is no time for sight-seeing Sonic, there's a huge robot below you who is going to rip you a new one.

Okay, so it isn't sounding like classic *Sonic* yet, but the action kicks-in the second that you set foot on these islands, and with each area split into three different acts the game begins to move into more familiar territories.

Each individually themed level is bright and vibrant, and that sensation of speed when Sonic outruns the brain's information-processing-cortex manifests itself throughout.



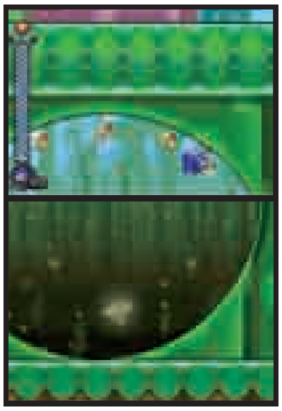
» As with *Sonic Rush*, many of the bosses are very impressive to look at and have evil attack patterns.

The graphics look the part, with a sharp-looking polygonal Sonic bounding in and out of the screen. Leading seamlessly from enjoyably chaotic 2D levels, into non-intrusive, dazzling 3D set pieces. And to round it all off there's even a nod to Dr Eggman in the shape of villainous pirate, Captain Whisker, who, with a name like that, must have been a ridicule magnet at pirate school.

IN SUMMARY

Some will like the seafaring aspect, others will think it just detracts from the frenetic action. Either way, if you're looking for a nostalgic *Sonic* game, this one's pretty watertight.

RATING **89%**







OPINION

I was a huge fan of the original *Sonic Rush*, but when I heard about the sequel I began to get worried. Luckily, I was getting wound up for nothing, as it has turned out to be a great sequel, which, unlike recent 3D efforts, is a return to form for Sega's mascot.

Sure you'll still get the occasional unfair death where Sonic plummets to his doom because a sudden drop has appeared out of nowhere, but these instances are few and far between. The vibrant graphics and insanely bouncy tunes, mean *Sonic Rush Adventure* is extremely pleasant on the senses, while the solid level design and cleverly constructed boss-fights hark back to the 2D days of old. Hell, even the Jet Ski sections are surprisingly fun to play (and look rather gorgeous to boot). A very solid platformer.

Darran Jones

HOMEBREW RATED

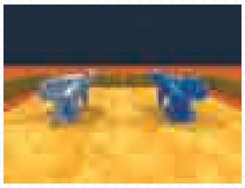
SPANNER GOES KUNG FU CRAZY WITH A LOOK AT A SELECTION OF HOMEBREW BEAT-'EM-UPS

SUMOTORI DREAMS

DRUNKEN SUMO

FORMAT: PC
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
LINK: HTTP://WEB.T-ONLINE.HU/ARCHEE83/SUMOTORI/
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: SPANNER

» From this starting position, the two warriors appear pretty stable and sturdy.



Sumo's not a sport often tackled by the videogame world, but that's only one reason why *Sumotori Dreams* is so special (and yes, we're using the world 'special' in the Ralph Wigum sense). What we have here is a miniature, 3D, one-on-one tournament fighting game that's so fluid it could rival the immortal *Virtua Fighter* for realistic body physics, although the characters might not quite match up to even the sparse detail of Sega's 1993 coin-op classic. But when you consider this game weighs in at less than 200K and sports a considerably higher resolution, the fact that these harlequin decked box-men can stand and fight is a miracle in itself.

That said, the purpose of this micro-game is not the actual combat abilities of the two exponents. After all, they only have three moves each (and that's if you include walking forward). This is a game all about timing. Timing, and falling over.



» One quick shove is all it takes to send them tumbling as only Harold Lloyd knew how.



» With crackerjack timing you can really get some distance out of your unsteady assailant.

The farcical, fluid and disturbingly natural stumbling of the two clumsy, computer-generated oafs is a joy to behold and we challenge anyone to see it and not laugh out loud as the crazy pair trip, stagger and roll about the ring.

Beginning in the traditional, squatted ready position of the sumo bout, both players must touch the ground to signal the beginning of the match. At this point, the players stand up (as precariously as two newborn deers) and attempt to either push the other out of the ring or simply remain on their feet the longest. A coloured brick is thrown into the ring to identify the winner, and the characters attempt to stand upright and bow to each other with whatever virtual dignity they have left after such an inelegant, drunken display.

A simple premise, but what's impressive is the fact that this game contains no predefined animations. The game engine is simply a realistic self-balancing algorithm for the ungainly wrestlers, and it's up to the player to push with either one hand or both at exactly the right time to make sure the opposition is shoved off their feet before you also crash gracelessly to the floor. This is a hilarious take on the *Virtua Fighter* model that's worth 20 minutes of anyone's coffee break, if for no other reason than laughing and pointing at a virtual, drunken tramp fight.

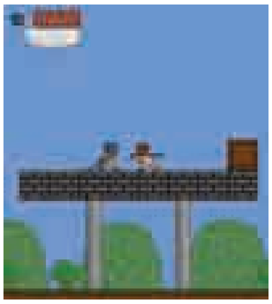
RATING 74%

NIKUJIN

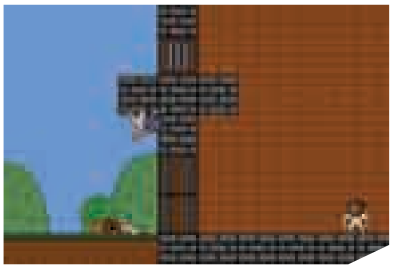
NEKKID NINJAS

FORMAT: PC
RELEASE DATE: OUT NOW
LINK: WWW.TIGSOURCE.COM/ARTICLES/2007/06/11/NIKUJIN
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: SPANNER

» The combat doesn't amount to much, but then again, it's not supposed to.



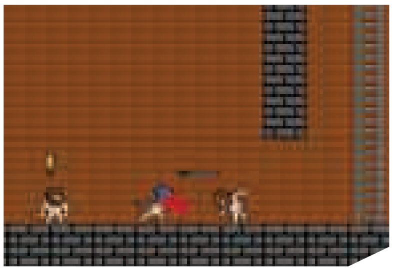
Continuing our journey East we find an unusual little gem of a platform/stealth/slash-'em-up cross breed, *Nikujin*, a Japanese freeware game that harks back to the NES with resounding success. There are so many games *Nikujin* reminds us of it's hard to decide where its influences are really to be found. Initially it smacks of *Super Mario Bros* with its clear, unadorned cartoon visuals, boxy platforms and the main character's slick-slide motion physics. A few minutes acclimatising to the simple controls and it seems to transform into a closer approximation of the celebrated NES version of *Ninja Gaiden*: sporting a distinctly similar protagonist with comparable abilities, such as sprinting, jumping, slashing with a sword and clinging to walls.



» Stealth kills are not what you'd expect in a game like this, but they're an important aspect of the engrossing gameplay.

Then, all of a sudden, it becomes *Tenchu* (a favourite of ours) where the importance of stealth and dexterity overtake the necessity for combat to the point at which the game would be thoroughly impossible for a run-and-gun, boots first, jump-and-bash tactician. Ultimately this proves that *Nikujin* is very much a game in its own right, borrowing casually from a variety of sources while being a slave to none, yet it never betrays the wonderful 2D platform genre it was born into.

It also becomes clear pretty damn quickly just how hard this game is. Addictive certainly, but also damn hard. The delicate precision required in jumping and running is equal to the dedication needed to fully absorb the surprisingly deep gameplay, which allows for stealth kills, super jumps, vertical wall running and a host of other totally unexpected yet impressive nuances not usually found in this kind of basic-looking platformer. For instance, falling too far kills Nikujin straight off, but if you're quick on the buttons hitting down as he touches the fall initiates a break-fall and he rolls lightly to safety. Land on an unsuspecting enemy's head (*Super Mario* style) and Nikujin plunges his sword into their head in a beautiful *Tenchu*-esque manoeuvre.



» On top of everything else, *Nikujin* is highly amusing and never fails to raise a smile – even when you fall off the edge.



» Clinging to walls and ceilings, as well as running up them and monkey jumping to the opposite side, are valuable skills.

To top it all off, the game is free and the ninjas are naked. One of many obscure games from doujin master Ikiku (home brew fans would do well to Google him), you simply cannot buy this kind of wicked, amusing, retro-esque action.

RATING 84%

CALL OF THE DRAGON: THE PERFECT EXAMPLE OF A GAME THAT LOOKS NEW, BUT PLAYS LIKE THE GOOD OLD DAYS

CALL OF THE DRAGON

SO YOU'RE NOT CALLED BRUCE THEN?

FORMAT: PC
RELEASE DATE: BETA OUT NOW
LINK: WWW.BANDEDSOFTWARE.COM/HEXGEAR/COD.HTML
PRICE: FREE
REVIEWED BY: SPANNER

» The Little Dragon returns in top miscreant thrashing style.



The beat-'em-up genre's been due for a revival for quite some time now, and *Call Of The Dragon* happily takes us one jumping-spinning kick closer. One of those paradoxical homebrew titles that uses modern tools, styles and content but still manages to encapsulate that intangible retro feeling quite admirably, *Call Of The Dragon* would have rocked the arcades had it been possible in 1988.

Taking on the role of Shui Long (a superb rendition of Bruce Lee in his prime), the action is simple left-to-right scrolling with enemies attacking only from the front or rear. While this might initially sound limited for a 3D game, it solves the extra-dimensional problem of targeting adversaries that other such scrolling fighters have long suffered from. The moves list is extensive and just difficult enough to access and that well pulled-off special attack brings with it a small feeling of achievement and enthuses the fighter to continue his mission in the hope of repeating (or bettering) that impressive combo.



» There's a lot of conspicuous debris lying around on the floor that might well be put to use in the finished game.

Although it really should be flagged up as a negative, the cumbersome method of manually turning the character to face the opposite direction is actually rather kitsch, reminding seasoned beat-'em-up fans of that long-forgotten irk when the characters passed each other mid combat. Your fighter refused to face the right way and was subsequently rabbit punched into submission by the computer-controlled opponent. Shui Long is replete with reverse attacks however, so it really isn't a problem that cries out for rectification.

Also included in this beta version is the (now) obligatory training dojo which lists the moves and provides either a punch bag or a Wing Chun wooden dummy for sparring practice. Nice.



» Pulling off special attacks gets a bit technical, but too many beat-'em-ups pander to the boorish button masher these days.

The visuals could do with a fair bit of work but it's clear from some of the more refined corners of the production that fine-tuning is being given plenty of attention. The audio is of course camp, with lots of shrill kiai noises, whip-lashing sound effects and chintzy music. Just as a good Bruce Lee flick should be.

This one-level beta demo of *Call Of The Dragon* is surprisingly addictive, and if some jerky, blurred, haphazard scrolling can be tweaked, developer Hex Gear Studios might well have a cult hit on its hands.

RATING: NA

RAID OVER MOSCOW

'PLAY IT LIKE THERE'S NO TOMORROW'



- » **PUBLISHER:** US GOLD
- » **DEVELOPER:** ACCESS
- » **RELEASED:** 1984
- » **GENRE:** SHOOT-'EM-UP
- » **FEATURED HARDWARE:** C64
- » **EXPECT TO PAY:** £5



HISTORY

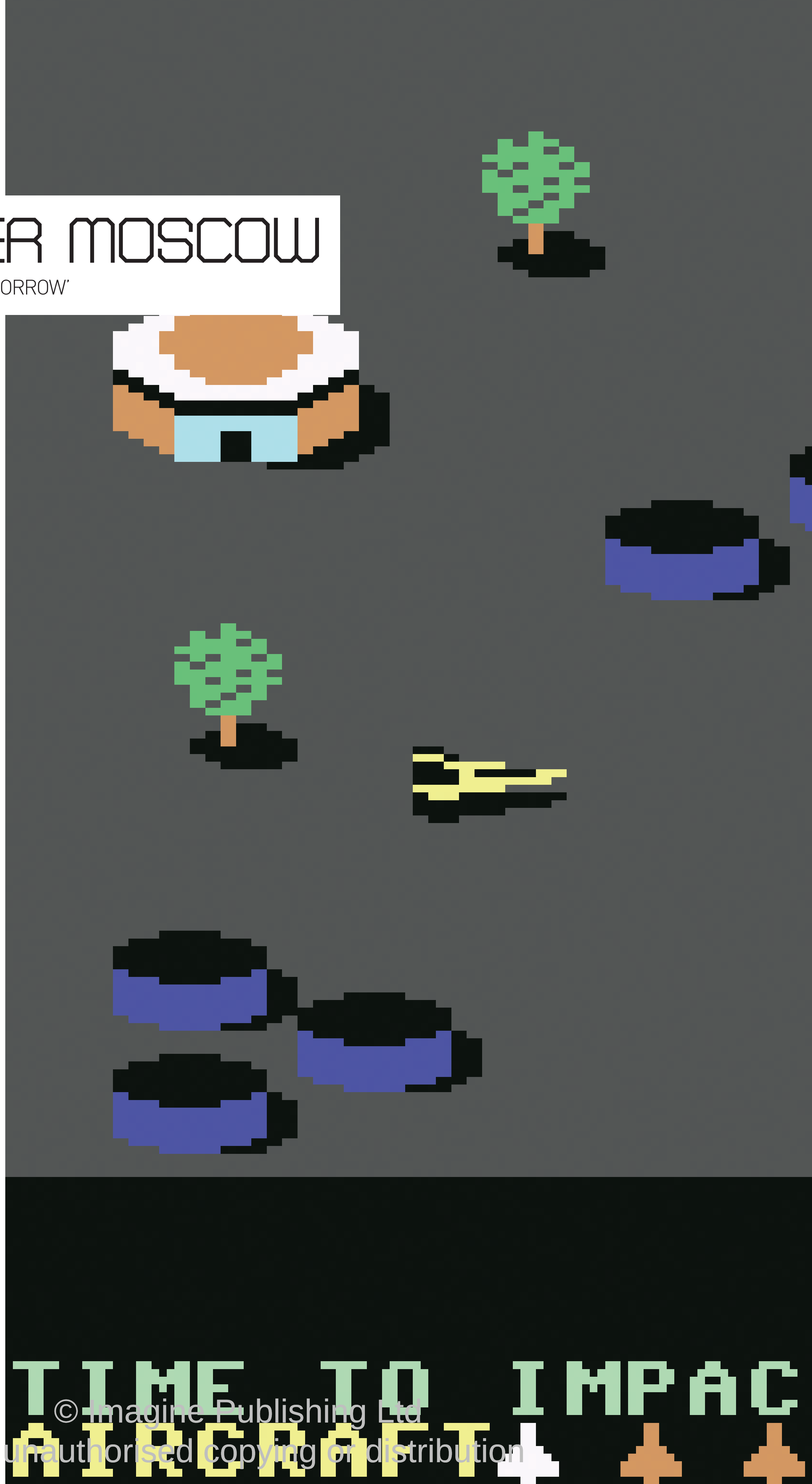
Raid Over Moscow **was the videogaming equivalent of Hollywood movies such as *War Games* or *Red Dawn*. Released amid Cold War tensions in the early-Eighties, it fed on Western paranoia of a perceived Soviet nuclear threat.**

In reality, the Soviet Bloc was already crumbling, and the Cold War was about to end under Gorbachev's leadership and reforms, post-1985. Luckily, the Carver brothers, creators of the huge-selling *Beach Head*, were willing to give us one last chance to defend the freedom of peace-loving Americans everywhere, by travelling to Russia and blowing Moscow to smithereens.

Raid Over Moscow followed a similar path to *Beach Head*, splitting progression into a number of linked sub-games. As a heroic stealth fighter-pilot manning an orbital space station it was your job to prevent Soviet nuclear strikes on a number of major American cities, by blowing up the missile control bunkers on Russian soil.

During the Asteroids-style launch sequence, many a would-be stealth pilot, who hadn't read the instructions revealing that you needed to press F7 in order to open the hangar doors, probably spent forever flying their craft into the staff canteen instead. Howver, once airborne a *Zaxxon*-like isometric shoot-'em-up sequence led you to the missile silos. After a required number had been destroyed and the US saved from nuclear obliteration it was then onto Moscow for the final showdown.

After blasting your way into the Kremlin, the final stage was a *Discs Of Tron* clone, where you bounced projectiles off a wall into the backs of robots keeping the Kremlin's nuclear facility operational. Success would reward you with the on-screen detonation of the plant, which incidentally seemed to take out about half of the surrounding city. Such is the price of capitalism. *Raid Over Moscow* may well be a Cold War relic, but like all of the Carver's polished products it's still a fascinating game.




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SCORE

BARGAIN HUNT

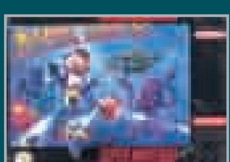
HUNT DOWN BARGAINS OR JUST DRINK UP THE LOVELINESS OF ALL THIS RETRO GOODNESS. FEAST YOUR EYES ON SIX PAGES OF THE VERY BEST THAT RETRO GAMING HAS TO OFFER…

Collecting retro games can be great fun, but you need to have a rough idea how much it's going to cost you. So here for your buying pleasure is *Retro Gamer*'s buyer's guide. Where possible we have endeavoured to list the earliest international launch date, be it Asia, America or Europe. Prices were compiled from a variety of sources, including eBay, Japanese auctions, car-boot sales, traders and general consensus. Foreign items will often be cheaper in their local country, so regional differences should be considered. Also, bear in mind that online items will often be cheaper than you will find in specialist stores. If you see an item selling for far less, good for you! We aim to help with finding those bargains, but if you see an item sold for much higher make sure you really want to purchase it. Prices fluctuate and the market sways, so there can never be a concrete listing. Bear in mind that something is worth as much as someone else is willing to pay. No one is perfect though, and we will openly admit that with over a hundred different systems to list, mistakes can happen. If you spot a glaring error in our listings, please drop us an email at retrogamer@imagine-publishing.co.uk and let us know about it.

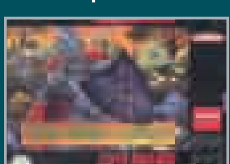
RETRO AUCTION WATCH

Retro Gamer will be sifting through countless pages of eBay and reporting on any items of interest (hardware and software) that have caught our eye. As you may have noticed, we've changed the theme recently and are looking at specific categories. This month: SNES platformers

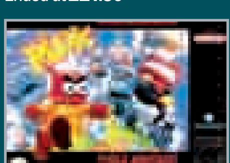
MEGA MAN X
Normally sells for **£20**
Ended at **£5.51**



SUPER GHOULS 'N GHOSTS
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **77 pence**



PLOK
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£21.50**



3DO



3DO GOLDSTAR
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£45+ ($83 - $111)**



PANASONIC FZ-1 (FRONT LOADER)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 - £60 ($74 - $111)**



PANASONIC FZ-10 (TOP LOADER)
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
While 3DO systems had much potential, there wasn't enough software support and it eventually stopped production. There were still some great games released!
- STAR CONTROL 2
- RETURN FIRE
- CRASH AND BURN

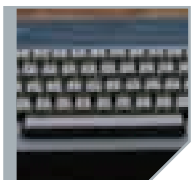
ACORN



ARCHIMEDES
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) with games**
Early RISC-based home computer, quite powerful at the time.



ATOM
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Extremely old home computer by Acorn that's now hard to find.



ACORN ELECTRON
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Budget version of the BBC home computer (below).

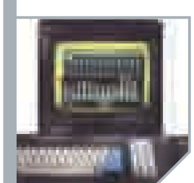


BBC MICRO
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
A classic British home computer, and quite popular. Affectionately known as 'the Beeb'.
- EXILE
- ELITE
- WAY OF THE EXPLODING FIST

AMSTRAD



CPC 464
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
Early classic 8-bit home computer from Amstrad, designed to compete against the C64 and ZX Spectrum. This early model has a built-in cassette tape deck. Beware the models that come with a green screen monitor!



CPC 664
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Like the 464, except with a floppy disk drive. A short-lived model that was soon replaced by the superior 6128.



CPC 6128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25+ ($46+)**
Improved model which doubled the RAM of previous iterations. Later 'Plus' models came with a cartridge port.
- GET DEXTER
- XOR
- SORCERY +



GX4000
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Console version of the CPC Plus range, came with joypads. Limited range of games.
- BURNIN' RUBBER
- PANG
- SWITCHBLADE

APPLE

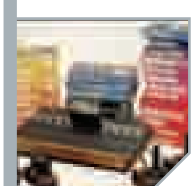


APPLE II
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+) with games**
Like many early computers the Apple II was hand-built and sold to enthusiasts.
- KARATEKA
- ULTIMA IV
- LODE RUNNER

ATARI



400/800/600XL/XE
» YEAR **1979**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Series of old 8-bit Atari home computers.
- DROP ZONE
- THRUST
- ZYBEX



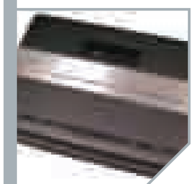
2600 (VCS)
» YEAR **1977**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Earliest console by Atari. Various models, many with the classic wood panelling effect. Many UK gamers had their first taste of videogames on this.
- PITFALL
- ADVENTURE
- COSMIC ARK

RARITY GUIDE

- ROCKING HORSE SHIT
- HEN'S TEETH
- LUCKY FIND
- EBAY REGULAR
- CAR BOOT SALE BARGAIN



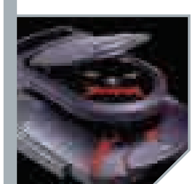
5200
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Unpopular successor to the 2600, regarded as an Atari 400 without a keyboard.
- RESCUE ON FRACTALUS
- DIG DUG
- ZAXXON



7800
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Handily, Atari made the 7800 backwards compatible with the ever popular 2600.
- KARATEKA
- CHOPLIFTER
- WINTER GAMES



JAGUAR
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Failed attempt to beat the PlayStation and Saturn in the console race. Few decent games. But it does have Jeff Minter's *Tempest*!
- TEMPEST 2000
- ALIEN VS PREDATOR
- BATTLESPHERE (RARE AND EXPENSIVE!)



JAGUAR CD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Rare and overpriced CD add-on for the Jaguar. Very few games, but it does look very much like a toilet seat!
- BATTLEMORPH CD
- HIGHLANDER CD
- TEMPEST 2000 MUSIC CD

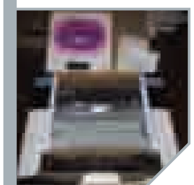


LYNX I/II (2ND IS SMALLER)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Powerful handheld from Atari that failed due to poor marketing and battery life.
- BLUE LIGHTNING
- CALIFORNIA GAMES
- DIRTY LARRY RENEGADE COP



ST
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) depending on model**
This is an Atari home computer and a big rival to the Amiga. There are many different models available, of various specifications.
- DUNGEON MASTER
- POPULOUS
- DAMOCLES

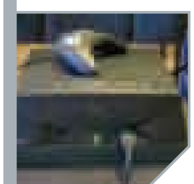
BANDAI



GUNDAM RX-78 COMPUTER
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£75+ ($138+) prices fluctuate wildly**
Ultra-rare, early Japanese games computer by Bandai. Aimed at both gamers and anime fans. Expect to pay a much higher price for a machine that's in mint condition.



PLAYDIA
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90 ($166) and upwards according to eBay**
Bizarre Japan-only console, apparently made for kids.
- SAILOR MOON
- ULTRAMAN
- DRAGON BALL Z



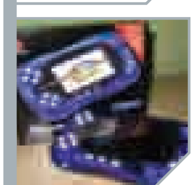
PIPPIN (ATMARK)
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £500+ ($921+)**
A strange hybrid system from Bandai and Apple. Very expensive and with very few games available. Its high price means that it's normally only sought after by collectors.
- RACING DAYS
- DRAGON BALL Z
- GUNDAM TACTICS



WONDERSWAN (B/W)
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



WONDERSWAN COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**



WONDERSWAN CRYSTAL
» YEAR **2000**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
Handheld system by Bandai, fairly popular. Can now be bought very cheaply, especially in Japan. Be sure to buy the SwanCrystal, which is basically an improved 'Color' model. Both colourised models can run B/W WS games.
- GUNPEY EX
- SWAN COLOSSEUM
- JUDGEMENT SILVERSWORD

COMMODORE



AMIGA500/600/1200
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+) more with games, depending on model**
Classic and incredibly popular 16-bit home computer by Commodore that was designed to compete against the Atari ST range. Vast array of different models with differing specs. The Amiga 500 (with a RAM upgrade) is a particular favourite with many gamers.
- SPEEDBALL 2: BRUTAL DELUXE
- LEMMINGS
- SENSIBLE WORLD OF SOCCER



C16/PLUS 4
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15+ ($28+)**
The less well-known sibling of the C64, but without the compatibility of its peers.
- TUTTI FRUTTI
- MONTY ON THE RUN
- KIKSTART



C64
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
One of the best-selling 8-bit home computers of all time. Competed against the Spectrum and Amstrad home computers. Featured the wonderful SID sound chip that was put to amazing use by the likes of Ben Daglish and Rob Hubbard.
- WIZBALL
- MAYHEM IN MONSTERLAND
- PARADROID



C64 GS (GAMES SYSTEM)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Commodore's cartridge-based machine that tried to take on both Nintendo and Sega. Sadly failed due to a lack of support from most publishers.
- PANG
- NAVY SEALS
- BATTLE COMMAND

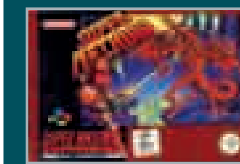


C128
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Three machines (CPM, C64 and C128) in one box. Specialised software is relatively small in number.



CDTV
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Commodore aimed for the 'every home should have one' market and missed by a country

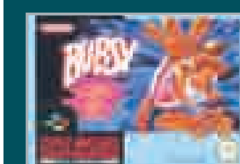
SUPER METROID
Normally sells for: **£10**
Ended at **£17.01**



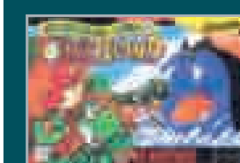
PITFALL: THE MAYAN ADVENTURE
Normally sells for **£5**
Ended at **£12.93**



BUBSY
Normally sells for **£3**
Ended at **No Sale**



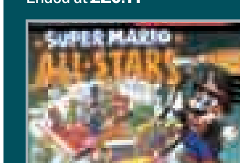
YOSHI'S ISLAND
Normally sells for **£25**
Ended at **£7.89**



DONKEY KONG COUNTRY
Normally sells for **£10**
Ended at **£3.37**



SUPER MARIO ALL STARS
Normally sells for **£14**
Ended at **£20.11**



mile. A curious mixture of games and educational material.



CD32
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
CD-based console that followed on from the experimental CDTV. Sometimes described as a consolised Amiga 1200 with CD drive. Despite featuring some extremely impressive games, the majority failed to improve on their 500 and 1200 counterparts.
- EXILE
- SIMON THE SORCERER
- ALIEN BREED 3D



VIC-20
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) based on condition/extras**
The computer that established the Commodore brand.
- HELLGATE
- SERPENTINE
- SUPER SMASH

FUJITSU

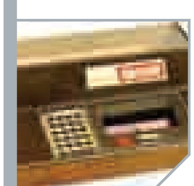


FUJITSU FM COMPUTERS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+)**
Early Nineties home computers by Fujitsu.



FUJITSU FM TOWNS MARTY
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200+ ($368+)**
A legendary console, which contains both a CD and disk drive. Based on Fujitsu's old FM Towns computers, and mostly backwards compatible with the majority of games. Very expensive (especially if you find a machine in mint condition), but with a lot of chic!
- ZAK MC KRAKEN
- TATSUJIN OU
- SCAVENGER 4

MISCELLANEOUS



BALLY ASTROCADE
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Early videogame system that used interchangeable cartridges, developed by the Bally games division at Midway Games.
- GATE ESCAPE
- ICBM ATTACK
- TREASURE COVE



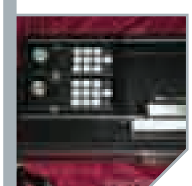
BARCODE BATTLER
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($18)**
Handheld LCD game, where you must swipe barcoded cards (or barcodes taken from soup packets!) to gather stats, and then battle against someone else who swiped barcodes. We're not making this up…
- GAMESTM ISSUE 25
- PLAY ISSUE 3
- 360 ISSUE 7



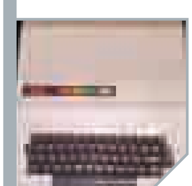
CASIO LOOPY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**
More inanity from the Land of the Rising Sun. This is a console designed especially for female gamers and it even allows stickers to be printed out… Casio hoped it would do better than their failed PV-1000 console released in 1983.



FAIRCHILD CHANNEL F
» YEAR **1976**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) from the USA**
The first commercially released console that used programmable cartridges. A real piece of history. Despite this, it's surprisingly cheap to purchase (although importing from the US may cost a fair amount).



COLECOVISION
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) standalone**
Coleco's third-generation videogame system. Quite a few decent games, and considering its age it's a fairly powerful machine. Many of its arcade conversions were considered superior to the other systems on the market.
- CONGO BONGO
- SMURPH RESCUE
- CABBAGE PATCH KIDS



DRAGON 32/64
» YEAR **1982/3**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15) very cheap on eBay**
Early British home computer that tried to cash in on the early Eighties boom. Short-lived, though quite popular. The 64 model was released roughly a year after the 32.
- GRID RUNNER
- DEVIL ASSAULT
- CAVE FIGHTER



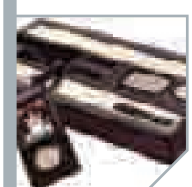
ARCADIA 2001
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Failed console by Emerson, which had numerous different clones released as well.
- FUNKY FISH
- JUNGLER
- ROBOT KILLER



EPOCH CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Obscure early Japanese console, which in 1983 had a budget 'Junior' model released.



EPOCH SUPER CASSETTE VISION
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Epoch's successor to the Cassette Vision, it was also marketed in Europe under the Yeno label. Apparently it only had around 30 games released for it.



INTELLIVISION
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40+ ($74+) depending on extras**
Developed by Mattel, the system was revolutionary. It was the first console to be technically 16-bit, go online (to download games), and it featured voice synthesis. Today it still has a strong retro following.
- FROG BOG
- ARMOR BATTLE
- LOCK 'N' CHASE



ODYSSEY
» YEAR **1972**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
The original home videogame console, even before Atari got in on the act! Created by Ralph Baer, this is the ultimate piece of gaming history. Fortunately, it can be purchased relatively cheaply.



ORIC-1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
The Oric-1 was a highly underrated 8-bit bit home computer created by Oric Products International. Despite having many games that were arguably superior to those on the Spectrum it was sadly unable to compete with the rival machine's high sales.
- XENON1
- INSECT INSANITY
- RAT SPLAT



PLAYSTATION
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on condition/model**
After manufacturing MSX machines, Sony re-entered the games hardware market and this time took it over. There are countless excellent PS games. It was later re-released as the PSone, which is more expensive but looks much nicer.
- CASTLEVANIA: SYMPHONY OF THE NIGHT
- FINAL FANTASY VII
- RIDGE RACER



SAM COUPÉ
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 - £200 ($92 - $368) allegedly for a mint system**
Originally developed by Miles Gordon Technology in Swansea, the Sam Coupé was a unique 8-bit British home computer that didn't fare very well. It could even emulate the 48K Speccy to a degree.
- DEFENDERS OF THE EARTH
- ESCAPE FROM THE PLANET OF THE ROBOT MONSTERS
- PRINCE OF PERSIA



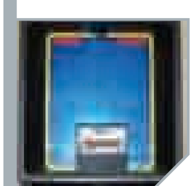
SUPERVISION
» YEAR **1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Marketed by several different companies, this was essentially a cut-price competitor to the monochrome Game Boy. Unsurprisingly, it was not manufactured for very long and is now hard to find.



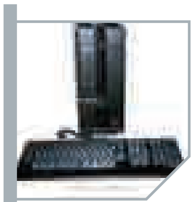
TIGER ELEC. GAME.COM
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
Attempt by Tiger Electronics to compete against the Game Boy.
- RESIDENT EVIL 2
- SONIC JAM
- DUKE NUKEM 3D



TOMY TUTOR (MK1/JR/MK2)
» YEAR **1983/4**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Series of old computers by Tomy.



VECTREX (MB/GCE)
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
The only home system ever to come with a vector display, enabling true vector graphics.
- SPACE WAR
- SPINBALL
- HYPERCHASE



X68000
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£90+ ($166+)**
Home computer by Sharp, released only in Japan. Famous for its arcade ports.
- CASTLEVANIA CHRONICLES
- STREET FIGHTER 2
- FINAL FIGHT

MSX



MSX 1
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+)**
An early attempt to create a standard gaming platform, fairly common in the UK.
- PENGUIN ADVENTURE
- KNIGHTMARE
- THE GOONIES



MSX 2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Updated and more powerful version of the MSX, very popular in Holland and Brazil where even today some excellent home-brew games are developed.
- METAL GEAR 2
- ALESTE 2
- VAMPIRE KILLER



MSX 2+
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
Another hardware update that proved to be very popular in Holland.
- SPACE MANBOW
- GOLVELLIUS 2
- F1 SPIRIT 3D SPECIAL



MSX TURBO R
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30+ ($55+)**
A final and not very popular hardware update, that was virtually exclusive to Japan.
- FRAY
- PRINCESS MAKER
- ILLUSION CITY

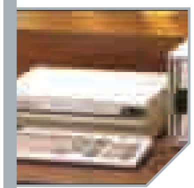
NEC



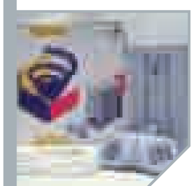
PC-6### (ALSO MK II)
» YEAR **1984 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10+ ($18+) depending on model**
Quite old 6000 series of home computers by NEC, with a lot of cool Japanese games for it. Released in the US as the NEC Trek. Be careful of shipping prices.



PC-8801
» YEAR **1981 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) cheap on Yahoo! Japan**
Old computer series by NEC, with several different models over the years. Has a massive roster of cool games, including the original *Silpheed*. While very cheap to buy online from Japan, shipping is expensive.



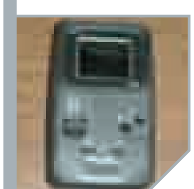
PC-9801
» YEAR **1983 onwards**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) cheap on Yahoo! Japan**
Another home computer series by NEC, again with many great games. Laptop versions also exist. Most games by Falcom are worth watching out for.



PCFX
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) prices can fluctuate**
32-bit tower console by NEC, resembles a PC. Released in Japan only, had software support until 1998. Only a few action titles. Apparently, it also had quite a bit of hentai on it.
- LAST IMPERIAL PRINCE
- CHOUJIN HEIKI ZEROIGAR (SHMUP)
- ZENKI FX (FIGHTER)



PC-ENGINE
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£55 ($101)**
Classic piece of Japanese hardware from NEC which features many excellent arcade ports and a few exclusives. The CoreGrafx system is basically a PC-Engine with AV output.



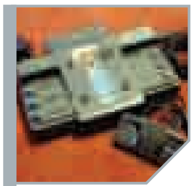
PC ENGINE GT
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70+ ($129+)**
Portable handheld version of the Japanese PC-Engine that played all Japanese Hu-Cards.



TURBO GRAFX-16
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
American version of the PC-Engine. It has territory lockout, so the two systems' Hu-Cards are not compatible.



TURBO EXPRESS
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92) massive fluctuations**
Portable handheld version of the American Turbo Grafx-16.
- BONK/PC KID SERIES
- PC KID
- OUTRUN



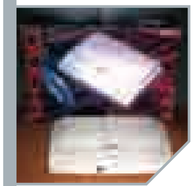
SUPER GRAFX
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147) prices can fluctuate**
Meant to be the successor to the original PC Engine, but sadly failed due to lack of games. It is backwards compatible, but only had six games specifically released for it.
- ALDYNES
- DARIUS PLUS
- GHOULS AND GHOSTS



PCE CD-ROM/ TURBO GRAFX CD
» YEAR **1988**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
CD-ROM add-on for the PCE and TG16, released in 1988 and 1989. It has no region lockout.



PCE DUO/TURBO DUO
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£120 ($221)**
System that combines the PCE/TG16 with its CD add-on. Released in both Japan and America in 1991 and 1992. The CD games still have no region lockout.



DUO-R
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Stripped-down white version of the PCE Duo, without headphone port. Later in 1994 a Duo-RX version was released, slightly blue in colour and came with a six-button control pad.
- DRACULA X
- SHUBIBINMAN 3
- LORDS OF THUNDER

NINTENDO



FAMICOM
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£60 ($111)**
Nintendo's first foray into the home console market, with over 1,000 games to choose from!



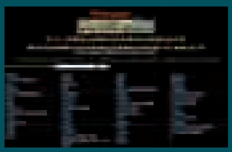
FAMICOM AV
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
A cheaper remodelled version of the Famicom, now with AV output.



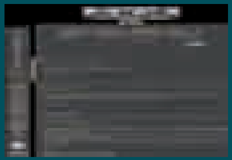
FAMICOM DISK SYSTEM
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£70 ($129)**
Nintendo's attempt to bring cheap rewritable disk-based gaming to the masses. Be warned, the drive belts break very easily.

RETRO GAMING SITES

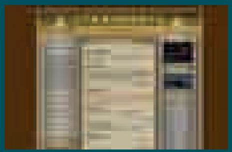
HANDHELD GAMES MUSEUM
If your knowledge of handhelds only goes back to the Game Boy then you must visit this site. There's a huge range of games to discover here. Essential, if you're into gaming on the go.
http://www.handheldmuseum.com/index.html



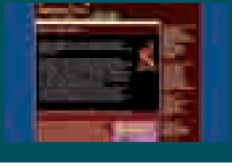
SYSTEM 16
Everything you could want to know about the arcade industry is lovingly documented at website. Almost every arcade game ever made is here, and there are plenty of screenshots of both the games and their PCB boards. Great stuff.
www.system16.com

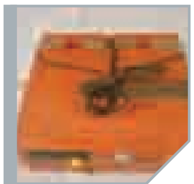


ATARIMANIA
We're always praising Atari-Age so we felt it was time we brought Atarimania to your attention. There's loads of information on offer and most types of Atari are covered in some form. Easy to navigate and home to a friendly forum, Atarimania is the perfect stop for Atari addicts.
http://www.atarimania.com/

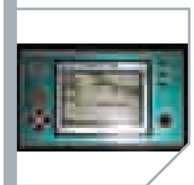


SEGA 8-BIT.COM
We'd never heard of this site, so thanks to forum member dr_bob for pointing it out. What we like about this Master System site is that it features useful reviews and a bustling forum, plus it also has plenty of fun stuff like a caption contest and weird stories.
http://www.sega8bit.com/





SHARP FAMICOM TWIN
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Combined Famicom and Disk System, by Sharp.
- OTOCKY
- NAZO NO MURASAMEJOU
- PATLABOR



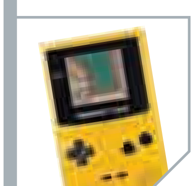
GAME&WATCH
» YEAR **1980-1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£1+ ($2+)**
Series of handheld LCD games that were created by the legendary Gunpei Yoko.



GAME BOY B/W
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£5 ($9)**
Nintendo's original handheld portable, with interchangeable cartridges. Despite its age, and monochrome display, there are many excellent classic GB games.



GAME BOY POCKET
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£8 ($15)**
A smaller and more compact Game Boy, with improved screen. A Japanese version with built-in light was released and sells for a much higher price.
- SUPER MARIO LAND
- TETRIS
- POKÉMON



GAME BOY COLOR
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£12 ($22)**
Colour-based version of the classic Game Boy. Backwards compatible, but it also has several exclusive games that were rather special.
- METAL GEAR SOLID: GHOST BABEL
- RESIDENT EVIL GAIDEN
- HARVEST MOON 3



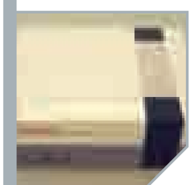
GAME BOY ADVANCE
» YEAR **2001**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46)**



N64
» YEAR **1996**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Nintendo's last cartridge-based console, competitor to the PlayStation and Saturn. Has several highly sought-after classics. Some games (like *Donkey Kong*) require the RAM expansion pack and wouldn't run without it.
- SUPER MARIO 64
- PILOTWINGS 64
- BLAST CORPS



N64 DD
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
Another attempt by Nintendo to incorporate disc media with one of its cartridge-based consoles. Expensive and very few games were released.
- F-ZERO EXPANSION KIT
- MARIO ARTIST SERIES
- DOSHIN THE GIANT



NES (TOASTER)
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28)**
The Western version of the Famicom, popular the world over. Plenty of great Nintendo classics to choose from, and it's very cheap too.



NES (DOG BONE)
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50 ($92)**
Remodelled and improved version of the traditional NES. Region lockout was also removed, meaning all 72-pin based NES games work.
- METROID
- THE LEGEND OF ZELDA
- SUPER MARIO BROS. 3



SNES (SUPER FAMICOM IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1990**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
Nintendo's successor to the NES, and one of the company's most popular machines. A retro staple with a fantastic selection of games.



SNES 2 (KNOWN AS 'JR' IN JAPAN)
» YEAR **1997**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+)**
Cheaper and redesigned SNES.
- SUPER METROID
- SECRET OF MANA
- SUPER MARIO WORLD



VIRTUAL BOY
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80 ($147)**
Nintendo's failed attempt at a pseudo Virtual Reality games system. Quite a novelty as there is nothing else like it. Be warned though, as many gamers have complained that the machine gives them headaches – never a good thing.
- INSMOUSE NO YAKATA (HP LOVECRAFT INSPIRED FPS)
- WARIO LAND
- RED ALARM

PHILIPS



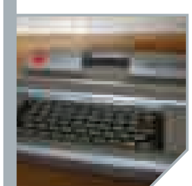
CD-I 205/210/220
» YEAR **from 1992**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20+ ($37+)**
Unique system by Philips. The 200 series consists of front-loading systems, with each one having slightly different specifications.



CD-I 450/500
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55) more with DVC**
This is the consolised version of previous models, with the latter 500 series featuring an integrated DVC.
- BURN CYCLE
- HOTEL MARIO



VIDEOPAC G7000
» YEAR **1978**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**
Popular across the world (especially Brazil and Holland) and known also as the 'Odyssey 2'.



VIDEOPAC G7400
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**
A successor to the G7000 that was backwards compatible.
- QUEST FOR RINGS
- PICKAXE PETE
- MUNCHKIN

SEGA



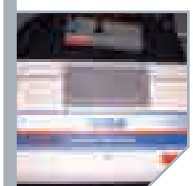
32X
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65) (with leads)**
Failed Mega Drive add-on, designed to enhance its capabilities.
- KNUCKLES CHAOTIX
- KOLIBRI
- DARXIDE



DREAMCAST
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£25 ($46) depending on extras**
Sega's final hardware release. No gamer should be without it. Amazing official roster of games, plus it can emulate older systems.
- SHENMUE
- SKIES OF ARCADIA
- REZ



GAME GEAR
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£15 ($28) more with extras**
Handheld by Sega, designed to compete against the Game Boy. Low battery life, but effectively a portable Master System. With add-on tuner, could also be used as a TV (as shown here).
- SHINOBI 2
- COLUMNS
- TV TUNER



SG-1000 (PLUS THE MARK II AND III)
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20-£50 ($37 - $$92)**
Sega's first console, and a piece of history! The Mark III model would later be redesigned to become the Master System. Like the Japanese Famicom, it's much nicer than the UK version.



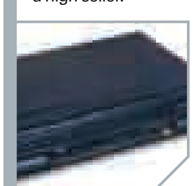
SC-3000
» YEAR **1983**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £50 ($92)**
Computer equivalent of the SG-1000, also by Sega. Was popular in Australia and other ex-colonies. Mutually compatible with the SG-1000 as well.



MASTER SYSTEM I/II
» YEAR **1985**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) with leads etc**
Popular Sega 8-bit console, which competed against the NES. Adapted from previous systems.
- PHANTASY STAR
- WONDER BOY 3: DRAGON'S TRAP
- CALIFORNIA GAMES



AMSTRAD MEGA PC
» YEAR **1993**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) according to eBay**
A strange hybrid between an Amstrad PC and a Mega Drive. A nice collectable oddity, though according to past eBay auctions, not a high seller.

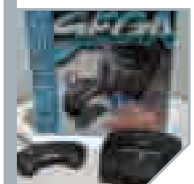


TERADRIVE
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £100 ($184)**
Another Mega Drive computer hybrid. Released earlier than the Amstrad hybrid, these systems have no connection.

Due to being exclusive to Japan, they are seldom seen in the wild. Likely to be very expensive if you are able to find one.



MEGA DRIVE/ GENESIS I/II
» YEAR **1989+**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18) depending on model**
The big daddy, Sega's most successful console and a retro classic.

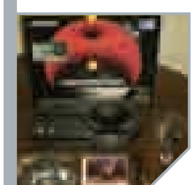


GENESIS 3
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Developed by Majesco. This third, cut-down model is rarer and has some compatibility issues. USA only.



NOMAD
» YEAR **1995**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184)**
Handheld Mega Drive. Pricey, low battery life and some compatibility problems.

- RANGER-X
- THUNDER FORCE IV
- COMIX ZONE



MULTIMEGA/ WONDERMEGA/ CDX/X'EYE
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100+ ($184+) depending on system**
A series of different hybrid MD and MCD systems, released in the three main territories.



MEGA CD (SCD) I/II
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£50+ ($92+) depending on system**
Sega's CD add-on for the Mega Drive. Despite heavy criticism, has many excellent games.

- POPFUL MAIL
- SNATCHER
- SONIC CD



PICO
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37) more with games**
Toy computer released for young children. The games come in nice storybook-style boxes.

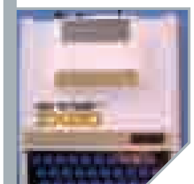
- SONIC'S GAMEWORLD
- ECCO JR AND THE GREAT OCEAN HUNT
- THE LION KING: ADVENTURES AT PRIDE ROCK



SATURN
» YEAR **1994**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£30 ($55)**
Sega's competition against the PlayStation and N64. A real 2D powerhouse that, despite an amazing catalogue of games, never really took off.

- BURNING RANGERS
- RADIANT SILVERGUN
- PANZER DRAGOON SAGA

SINCLAIR

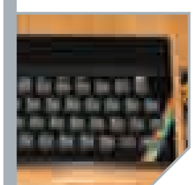


ZX-80
» YEAR **1980**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£200 ($368) apparently if boxed and mint**
Very early British home computer from Sinclair. Low capability meant limited gaming possibilities. Now extremely hard to get hold of.



ZX-81
» YEAR **1981**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) if mint**
Improved home computer from Sinclair, with black and white ASCII graphics. Not as hard to source as a ZX-80, but still commands a respectable price.

- 3D MONSTER MAZE
- MAZOGS
- SABOTAGE



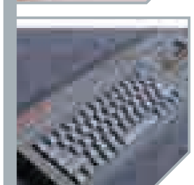
ZX SPECTRUM 48K
» YEAR **1982**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£10 ($18)**



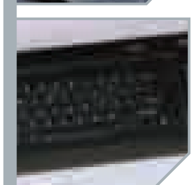
ZX SPECTRUM 128K
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**



ZX SPECTRUM+
» YEAR **1984**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



ZX SPECTRUM +2
» YEAR **1986**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**



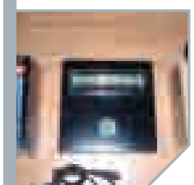
ZX SPECTRUM +3
» YEAR **1987**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£40 ($74)**
The British classic loved by many. A vast improvement over previous Sinclair computers, the Spectrum was normally compared against the C64 and Amstrad home computers, which in turn caused many playground arguments over who had the better machine.

- HEAD OVER HEELS
- 3D DEATHCHASE
- SKOOL DAZE

SNK



NEO-GEO AES
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£150+ ($276+)**
High-powered home system by SNK. Features many high-quality arcade games. Sadly, many titles are now ridiculously expensive to purchase.



NEO-GEO MVS
» YEAR **1989**
» RARITY
» PRICE **Approx £70 ($129) multi-slot systems cost more**
High-powered arcade system by SNK, which many people prefer over the home-based AES due to lower pricing of games. (The majority of Neo-Geo titles appeared on both systems, or alternatively can be converted.)

- METAL SLUG 3
- KING OF FIGHTERS 96
- BLAZING STAR

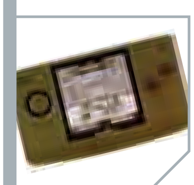


NEO-GEO CD
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£100 ($184) varies**



NEO-GEO CDZ
» YEAR **1991**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£80+ ($147+)**
CD-based Neo-Geo systems, an attempt by SNK to lower the cost of Neo-Geo games. The CDZ is cheaper and has improved loading times. Most CD titles are ports from the AES/MVS.

- VIEWPOINT
- AGGRESSORS OF DARK COMBAT
- SAMURAI SHODOWN RPG



NEO-GEO POCKET (B/W)
» YEAR **1998**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£20 ($37)**

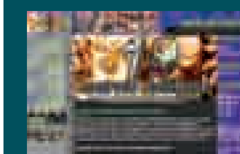


NEO-GEO POCKET COLOR
» YEAR **1999**
» RARITY
» PRICE **£35 ($65)**
Handheld Neo-Geo systems by SNK that sadly failed to compete with the Game Boy, despite featuring some great games. Still a wonderful little system, though. Be sure to buy the later colour screen model.

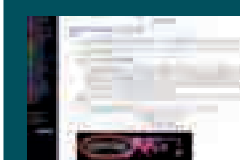
- FASELEI!
- CARD FIGHTERS (CAPCOM/SNK)
- MATCH OF THE MILLENNIUM (CAP VS SNK)

RETRO GAMING SITES

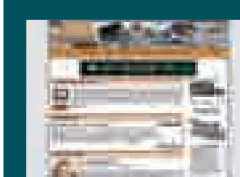
THE METROID DATABASE
Did you know that it's *Metroid*'s 20th birthday this year? You didn't? Well that's because you obviously haven't visited the Metroid Database. Every single game in the series, from NES to the recently released Wii title is included and the passionate forum is filled with helpful fans. An excellent fan site befitting an excellent franchise. **http://mdb.classicgaming.gamespy.com/**



ARCADE CONTROLS
Interested in restoring old arcade cabinets or creating a MAME cab? Then it's best if you head over to Arcade Controls. This is one of the finest resources online if you're in to making arcade cabinets. You'll find an answer to every question you could think of. Be prepared though, the site is huge so it's going to take a fair amount of time to navigate. **http://arcadecontrols.com/arcade.htm**



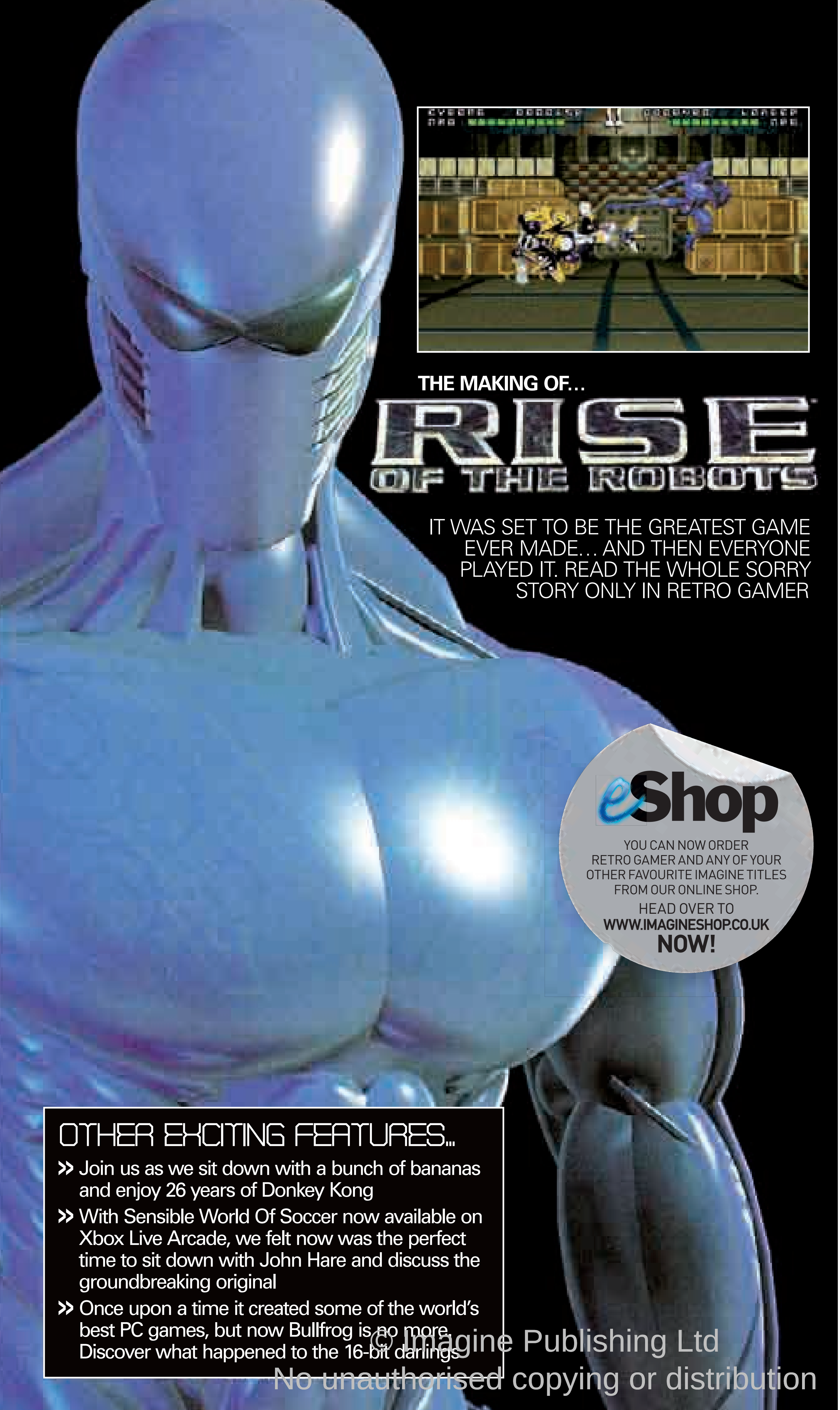
THE MEAN MACHINES ARCHIVE
Slowly, but surely The Mean Machines Archive is becoming one of the best fansites online, and it's nothing to do with the site's owner being a regular contributor to *Retro Gamer*. All the MM team have been interviewed, and you can even read about all the gossip that couldn't fit into *RG* 31's feature. **http://www.meanmachinesmag.co.uk/**



Special thanks to **lofi-gaming-org.uk** who supplied several of our screenshots

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THE MAKING OF…

RISE OF THE ROBOTS

IT WAS SET TO BE THE GREATEST GAME EVER MADE… AND THEN EVERYONE PLAYED IT. READ THE WHOLE SORRY STORY ONLY IN RETRO GAMER

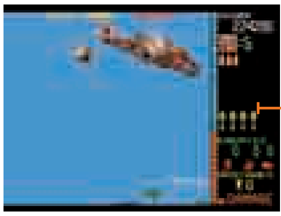
OTHER EXCITING FEATURES…

- Join us as we sit down with a bunch of bananas and enjoy 26 years of Donkey Kong
- With Sensible World Of Soccer now available on Xbox Live Arcade, we felt now was the perfect time to sit down with John Hare and discuss the groundbreaking original
- Once upon a time it created some of the world's best PC games, but now Bullfrog is no more. Discover what happened to the 16-bit darlings

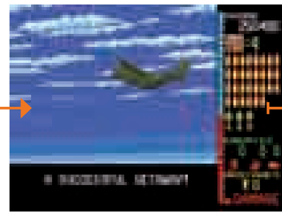


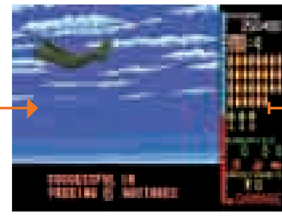
OPERATION WOLF

Was it an actual lightgun game? Who cares? Taito's Operation Wolf was great fun and here's what happened if you were good enough to reach its last level











SCREEN 1
You've managed to get all of the missing hostages on board, but now you've got another problem to deal with – namely an absolutely massive attack helicopter. Eep!

SCREEN 2
What were we worrying about? After destroying over 40 helicopters, 12 trucks, 23 tanks and around 350 soldiers; a single helicopter proves to be a walk in the park.

SCREEN 3
Look at that, the metal bird soars off into the sky and you can quickly congratulate yourself on a job well done while wondering if you should bring a friend along for the sequel.

SCREEN 4
With all five hostages confirmed, you begin to wonder what you're going to do once you've returned to base. With thoughts of a holiday in Fiji entering your mind, you head off to find your superior.

SCREEN 5
After a quick stat breakdown, and some praise from a man who looks like a saddlebag with eyes, you're horrified to learn that you've got to start your mission all over again. So much for Fiji…